

February 1994

A CONFERENCE TOWARDS SPIRITUAL CONCORD

AS A

METAPHOR OF SPIRITUAL CONCORD

Reports on Significant Meetings

Rendered searchable by OCR, but recognition errors may prevent this in some cases. PHP variants (incomplete tables) via <http://www.laetusinpraesens.org/docs90s/94spirco.php#3>

Anthony J N Judge
Union of International Associations
40 rue Washington, B-1050 Brussels, Belgium (Fax: (32 2) 646.05.25)

REFLECTIONS ON AN INTER-FAITH MEETING

(Brussels-Louvain, September 1992)

1. Sponsor: Organized by the Community of S. Egidio, a Rome-based group with 15,000 members in some 20 countries. It is recognized by the Holy See. A special international body has been created to supply continuity: Association International Meetings People and Religions. The theme was: Europe, Religions and Peace.

2. History: Initiated as a result of the 1986 Day of Prayer meeting in Assisi held by Jean Paul II. Subsequent meetings held in: Rome 1988, Warsaw 1989, Bari 1990, Malta 1991. Next to be held in Milan 1993. Themes always focus on inter-faith dialogue in relation to peace.

3. Location: Plenary sessions in a 1,000 person hall (full for closing plenary) on the Louvain University campus, with working sessions in university buildings scattered around Louvain. These were difficult to get to or to move between. Presumably this was not considered desirable. A closing session was held in the Grand Place at Brussels, preceded by prayer meetings for different traditions in surrounding buildings. It is not clear whether there were any occasions for collective prayer/meditation for participants before or in parallel with the conference process.

4. Participants: Claimed to be 300 people from 90 countries; a striking number (possibly 100) of highly visible religious authorities from different orthodox and oriental religions. No list of participants seemed to be available. Presumably this is a matter of some delicacy. The opening keynote speech was by Mugabe, President of Zimbabwe (assistance to the South was a theme)

(a) In addition 1,000 people were bussed in from the Community in Italy, many of whom assisted in operating the conference. It was difficult to locate genuine participants, unless they were wearing unusual clothing (as was the case for many religions). There was a strong presence of Catholic hierarchy.

(b) There were remarkably few women among the visible "official" participants (possibly 5), none of whom spoke to plenary sessions. This was especially evident in the televised closing session, where only one definite woman was spotted amongst the signatories, plus two possibles (exotically disguised).

(c) Speakers all tended to be "Cardinal", "Patriarch", "High-Priest", "Grand Mufti", etc successfully creating an impression of great authority. Whether those attending were really the key people in each case, or diplomatic compromises to save face, is difficult to tell given the difficulties of organizing such an event.

(d) Religions represented included: Catholic, Buddhist, Islam, Jewish, Shinto, Zoroastrian, Confucian, Hindu, Lutheran, Zen Buddhist, Orthodox (from an amazing variety of Middle Eastern historical groups), Jain, Mandeian, Protestant, Anglican. The Christian religions that were not Catholic or Orthodox, were only represented by a few token individuals. This suggests much politically manoeuvring over invitations and acceptances.

(e) International groups seemingly represented (but perhaps not "officially" or by other than secondary representatives): WCC, World Islamic League, Conference of Rabbis of Europe, Methodist World Alliance, YWCA, EEC, UNIAPAC, International Council for Christians and Jews, World Baptist Alliance. Again, Christian organizations of a non-Catholic tradition were not significantly represented. It was particularly striking that representatives of other inter-faith bodies were not visible (notably the World Conference on Religion and Peace, International Association for Religious Freedom, World Congress of Faiths, or the new body of which these are all members: International Interfaith Organizations Coordinating Committee). No mention was made of these bodies or their initiatives in the various historical references to this meeting series. Presumably there are very strong inter-faith political issues at stake.

(f) There were apparently no representatives from the Christian charismatic and guru-based spiritual groups. Nor were there representatives from groups with a specific interest in facilitating spiritual concord, such as the Bahai.

(g) There was a tight system of security with metal detectors and search procedures on entry.

(h) aside from the official participants and the 1,000 Community members, all but the opening session were open (and free) to outsiders. However the publicity and location were such that few outsiders appeared to attend.

5. Claim to uniqueness: A number of efforts were made to suggest that this series was the only place where inter-faith initiatives were being taken, although reference was made to the original World Parliament of Religions (1893). But no reference was made to the 1993 centennial during which a new World Parliament of Religions will be organized. This indicates a fundamental problem of disguised bias.

6. Public relations: The whole conference was very smoothly conducted and created the impression of a desirable degree of concord orchestrated by the Catholic hierarchy. The closing meeting in the Grand Place was on Belgian television for about an hour and was impressively done. Great attention seems to have been given to placing people for PR effect. The television only focussed close-up on the array of non-Catholic exotic participants, whereas a large-scale view showed that they only formed a third of the group. The event was neatly bracketed by opening and closing interventions by Cardinals (standing in front of the exotics), with a message from the Pope. It gave the impression the inter-faith initiative was very much a Catholic one and that was where the action was. Non-Catholic religions were very effectively "positioned" in a space designed by Catholics. It would be interesting to know their sense of the extent to which such religions felt manoeuvred beyond that required by the constraints of infrastructure and scheduling.

7. Organization:

(a) Languages: Plenaries were interpreted between Italian, English, French, Dutch, Japanese and Arabic. Some speakers spoke in Hebrew.

(b) Press office: Some prepared texts were available in their original language from the press office.

(c) Conference brochure: A very glossy 55-page brochure which serves as a means of describing the achievements of the previous conference. A 4-page article on "interreligious dialogue and peace" makes no mention of initiatives by any other bodies.

(d) Reports: There do not appear to be any reports of previous conferences. It is not clear where their papers were published. On display were only the documents published by the Community. No documents from other inter-faith events were on display.

8. Working sessions: There was one day of working sessions with 8 parallel sessions in the morning and 9 in the afternoon. It would have been difficult to move between sessions. The sessions were mainly organized geographically or in relation to specific religions (Buddhism) or interactions (North-South, Christian-Jews).

9. Dynamics: The mode was very strongly one of presentation of prepared scripts.

(a) Plenaries: There were few spontaneous comments in plenary sessions. Indeed some speakers went uninterpreted if they deviated from the texts they had submitted to the interpreters in advance. Speakers did not even refer, or respond, to each other. There were no questions from the floor.

(b) Working sessions: A similar mode was followed in the working sessions, although with more interaction between speakers. If there were any interventions from the floor, they were highly restricted.

(c) Corridors: Given the language problem, it is not clear what communication was possible between

participants. However it is clear that bonds and friendships were cultivated and these may be of the greatest long-term significance.

(d) Dialogue: Since a basic theme of the event was "dialogue", these dynamics raise basic questions about the ability of such meetings to tolerate dialogue -- and the meaning given to it.

(e) Participant isolation: In such a managed context, it would be quite possible for a participant to have no verbal contact with any other participants for the duration of the meeting.

10. Output: The final output took the form of an Appeal, ceremoniously signed by all during the televised closing session. Clearly this will be reprinted in various places but it is unclear that it says anything more than previous appeals, or that any collective body is able to act on it.

11. Content: There seemed to be relatively little content to the event. Given the earlier meetings in the series, and the workshop sessions, no cumulative insight was noted. No reference was of course made to the content and achievements of other inter-faith events. There was no indication of future areas to be worked upon or the nature of that work. The "content" seemed to lie more on the symbolic level with the ability of the participants to "co-exist" visibly for a period and to make peaceful gestures to each other. The spoken texts contained very little that was new or that addressed the issues of dialogue in a concrete way. There was much expression of hopes and values, deploring of ills, appeals to others, emphasis on prayer -- but little to carry away. It is extraordinary that men of wisdom should take so long to say so little -- especially when they are capable of citing wisdom in sacred texts in a few phrases.

12. Achievement: It was a remarkable achievement which successfully and publicly reinforced a pattern. It successfully disguised the full dimensions of the challenge of religious dialogue. Perhaps this is a result of earlier diffidence on the part of the other inter-faith initiatives in dealing effectively with the Catholic hierarchy. It could be argued that these issues (whether hidden or evident) make of the event a metaphor of the larger problems of dialogue, inter-religious solidarity, and peace.

FIRST WORLD CONGRESS TOWARDS SPIRITUAL CONCORD

(Alma Ata, October 1992)

INTRODUCTION

It is unprecedented for the government of a newly independent country to provide extensive official support for a large international non-governmental conference -- especially for a country in which "nongovernmental" initiatives are a new and questionable phenomenon. That the conference should be organized on behalf of an international body headquartered in the capital of the former ruling superpower increases the challenge of creative diplomacy. But it is even more difficult to imagine any government providing official support for a conference on "spiritual concord" -- and that this should be done in a country that is far from wealthy (as one of its first international conferences) is a further challenge to belief.

And yet, without external subsidies, the Government of Kazakhstan placed extensive facilities and resources at the disposal of the First World Congress towards Spiritual Concord recently held in its capital of Alma Ata (October 1992) with the explicit benediction of its President N Y Nasarbajev and his wife. The congress of 2,500 participants was organized by the International Association "Peace through Culture" (based in Moscow) in the record time of 3 months. This is a tremendous achievement by any standards, but especially in a country in considerable political and economic turmoil.

The physical location of the conference in Central Asia ensured an unusual range of participants. In these times of transition for the countries emerging from the Soviet Union it raised unusual challenges in terms of feasibility. The socio-political traditions developed within the Soviet Union favour a command approach which is less than satisfactory to nongovernmental conferences seeking other forms of interaction in which they are as yet inexperienced. How these challenges can be met is a matter of great interest for the future.

GLOBAL CONTEXT

The dimensions of the social, economic, environmental and political challenges of the world are now discussed at most levels of society. The international community has explored many responses carefully articulated in numerous programmes in many contexts. Despite such initiatives, it is clear to many that the situation is getting worse rather than better. Commitments made are diluted or ignored - notably in the case of the follow-ups to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (June 1992). The favoured ways of thinking and organizing have proved inadequate to the challenge.

In this context many are ready with "answers" in the light of their particular perspective, whether scientific, political, economic or otherwise. Many millions continue to place great hope in the transcendent perspectives offered by religion. Others are quick to challenge religions because of their inability to reconcile their own differences in any creative way -- differences which continue to exacerbate conflicts around the world (with Yugoslavia being but the most currently visible example). The old styles of governance have completely lost their credibility. Religious hierarchies and movements, whether old or new, see an opportunity to occupy territory on which the disciplines of the 20th century have demonstrated their incompetence.

The past decades have seen many explorations of "inter-faith dialogue". These have served to develop communications between religions traditionally hostile to one another. A body of understanding has developed and in many cases bonds of friendship have been formed where enmity previously prevailed. This has however changed little in practice. The identity of particular religions remains closely associated with practices and beliefs which are unacceptable to other religions -- whether or not they are "tolerated". Fundamentalism remains a continuing concern, whether in Islam, Hinduism or Christianity.

Efforts at inter-faith dialogue have themselves been subject to the dynamics typical of parallel initiatives on over-lapping topics. As with any international initiatives, that undertaken by one configuration of religious forces or factions is often viewed with suspicion by another. There is a marked tendency within any one context to ignore related initiatives. This can of course always be readily justified by emphasizing the specificity of the favoured initiative.

At this point in time there are a number of inter-faith initiatives. Four are grouped within an International Interfaith Organizations Coordinating Committee (created 1991). They are: International Association for Religious Freedom (created 1900), World Congress of Faiths (1936), World Conference on Religion and Peace (1970), and Temple of Understanding. The World Council of Churches (1948) may also be considered as such, especially through the various inter-faith dialogues that it has organized. Another is the series of meetings (Assisi 1986, Rome 1988, Warsaw 1989, Bari 1990, Malta 1991, Louvain-Brussels 1992, Milan 1993) organized by the Community of S. Egidio under the auspices of the Catholic Church. 1993 is in fact the centennial of the World Parliament of Religions (Chicago, 1893). It is being marked by a number of events, notably a succession of meetings in India. A second World Parliament of Religions is also scheduled (Chicago, August 1993).

SPECIFIC CONTEXT

During the 1930s, a remarkable individual of Russian origin, Nicholas Roerich (1874-1947), was instrumental (through an international NGO, the International Union for the Roerich Pact) in bringing into being an intergovernmental treaty. This was the *Treaty on the Protection of Artistic and Scientific Institutions and Historic Monuments* (in force 1935) otherwise known as the "Roerich Pact", which presumably remains in force in international law. Roerich was an anthropologist and painter, based in the USSR, later in the USA, and finally in the Himalayas. He specialized in Central Asia. He promoted widely a concern for peace through culture. His concerns were obscured from the 1940s but interest in his work (and notably his 7,000 inspirational paintings) has been maintained in the West through various Roerich societies. With the fall of communism, some 500 Roerich societies have blossomed in Russia alone. An International Roerich Memorial Trust is headquartered in Bangalore (India).

In the former Soviet Union, an International Association "Peace through Culture" was founded in Moscow in 1989 on the initiative of the Writers Union and other cultural organizations (including Roerich groups) with the direct support of Mikhael and Raisa Gorbachev. Its membership spread rapidly during the turbulent process of breakdown of the USSR and now has members 11 countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Germany, India, Kazakhstan, Nepal, Poland, Russia, Switzerland, Ukraine, USA. As an "international association" formally recognized under Russian law, the organization has special privileges, notably the unusual one for an NGO of being able to support the issue visas (a right normally restricted to official trade organizations). The association held a conference in Moscow in October 1991 which issued an appeal "Towards Spiritual Concord" that stressed the importance of placing spiritual principles above political expediency and called for a congress on that theme. This was positively received by leading personalities of Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and many spiritual-cultural communities.

In April 1992, on the initiative of the Kazakhstan "Peace through Culture" group, the President of Kazakhstan invited the international association to hold its proposed international congress in Alma Ata with an agreement to support the congress at the highest level. In June 1992, President Nasarbajev accepted patronage of the congress and the support of key political and spiritual leaders was obtained, including that of the Dalai Lama. Meanwhile, in May 1992, a primarily German-speaking affiliate of the international association was created (and based in Munich) to represent individuals in Europe as a whole.

Because of the unstable political and economic condition in the former Soviet Union, the decision was taken to use this window of opportunity and to organize the congress in October 1992 -- despite the unusual time constraints for such an event. The Kazakhstan government, through its various economic institutions, provided funding, thus reducing the cost of foreign participation.

ALMA ATA

Little known in the West as a constituent republic of the former USSR, Kazakhstan is in fact larger in size than Western Europe but with a population of only 16.7 million inhabitants, of which 6 million are Russian-speaking, and almost 1 million are descendants of German-speaking peoples displaced as a result of World War II. Kazakhstan prides itself on being home to over 100 ethnic groups, practising a mix of religions including Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. The 1000-year tradition of religious harmony is explicitly recognized and cultivated. Striking to Western eyes, is the freedom of Kazakh women compared to those of other countries with a strong Islamic influence -- a freedom to which many women in Western countries might also aspire. This too is a traditional feature of Kazakh culture, where women were expected to ride and even fight like men.

Much of the country is impoverished by the standards of industrialized countries. As home to Baikonur, the principal space launching facility of the former USSR, Kazakhstan has the dubious distinction of being the poorest country with the most nuclear missiles. The extensive past use of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan as a principal site for nuclear weapons tests by the USSR has recently attracted attention, especially because of the high proportion of children now being born with genetic defects.

Alma Ata, the capital of 1 million inhabitants, benefitted from considerable investment during the Brezhnev era and is a pleasant city of low-lying buildings set back from tree-lined streets. It is partially surrounded by a ridge of mountains from the Northern Himalaya and Altai ranges. It has become the headquarters of the World Antinuclear Alliance of Citizens and Legislators (Nevada, Semipalatinsk, Muruoa).

The unusually agreeable feel to the city and the mood of its inhabitants can perhaps be illustrated by one simple practice that has a strange impact on Westerners. In the overcrowded rush-hour buses, which have no ticket collectors, money is passed forward to the bus driver from passenger to passenger. The ticket, and any change, is returned by the same means. It is difficult to imagine this level of trust in any industrialized country.

In addition to the religious tradition of Kazakhstan, Alma Ata itself is recognized as an important symbol of the spirituality common to several traditions. The name Alma Ata may even be translated in symbolic terms as the "original apple". Roerich noted in the 1930s that the ancient spiritual traditions were still active there. For those of esoteric persuasion, it can epitomize the hidden places of the mystical East and the home of hidden masters of wisdom. Inhabitants, including government officials, readily comment on the cleansing spiritual energies of that environment.

The congress was held in the Congress Palace -- a magnificent, marbled building, capable of holding 3,000 participants, with access to simultaneous interpretation. It was but a brief walk across a park to the main congress hotel. The complex will undoubtedly have a successful future as an international conference site.

PARTICIPANTS AND REPRESENTATION

The congress brought together over 2,500 people in some sessions, of which 600 were from outside Kazakhstan, but with less than 100 from the industrialized countries of Western Europe and North America. Participants came from the following countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Czechoslovakia, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Pakistan, Russia, South Africa, Switzerland, Turkey, UK, Ukraine, Uruguay, USA, Uzbekistan. There were 350 journalists from some 30 countries.

Of greater interest than the numbers of participants was the variety of spiritual traditions and tendencies represented. These included: Buddhism, Hinduism, Orthodox Christianity (Russian, Ukrainian, Indian), Christian fundamentalists, Islam, and Zoroastrianism. Also represented were spiritual movements and organizations including: Ramakrishna Mission, Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, Roerich foundations (Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan), Jews and various groups (Mamluk, Kalmuk, Taoist, Theosophist, Krishnamurti, Gurdjieff, Krishna Consciousness, Rosicrucian, Sufi, Agni Yoga). These reflected such concerns as: orthodox spiritual practices, spiritual healing, charismatic

approaches, esotericism, humanism, and ethical materialism. Also present were gurus of various kinds, spiritual healers and business leaders.

Many participants exhibited considerable levels of commitment in travelling great distances within their economic constraints (for example, students travelling three and half days by train from St Petersburg). In that region, 1,000 kilometers by train is considered "not far".

The languages of the congress were Russian, Kazakh, English and German, although workshop interpretation tended to be more limited.

KEY FIGURES AND ENDORSEMENTS

The congress was formally endorsed by Buddhists (in the person of the Dalai Lama, represented at the event by Telo Tulku Rinpoche, Shadzhin-Lama of Kalmykia), Orthodox Christians (Paulos Mar Gregorios, Metropolitan of Delhi and President of the Inter-Religious Federation "World Peace"), Hindus (Sankaracharya Jayendraj), Moslems (Ahmed B Zakharia, Islamic Cultural Centre, Bombay), the Ramakrishna Mission (Swami Jotirupananda, Moscow), the International Theosophical Society (Pedro Rogerio Moreno de Oliveira, Adyar), Krishnamurti Foundation (Sri Radhakani Ramakani Upasani, India), Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (B K Chakradhari, General Director), Zoroastrians (Meher Master-Moos, President of Zoroastrian College, Bombay). The Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia was also represented.

The key personalities in the actual organization of the event may be clustered into three groups:

- (a) Valentin Siderov, President of the International Association (Moscow)
Afenasy Vesselitskij, General Secretary of the International Association
- (b) Wilhelm Augustat, President of the European Association (Munich)
Andreas Graf Dönhoff, Vice-President of the European Association
Arnold von Keyserling, School of Wisdom (Vienna)
- (c) Tolegen M Mukhameganov, President, Kazakh Association "Peace through Culture"

It is to be noted that the Russian and German-speaking personalities could only communicate through interpreters.

ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE

The event was organized from Moscow, in collaboration with the Kazakh "Peace through Culture" group, with the advice and material support of the European group. None of the partners had concrete experience in the organization of international conferences. It was therefore natural to rely on the traditional approach to conference organization developed within the USSR. Where use could be made of the well-honed command structures, certain infrastructure details (hotels, transportation, interpretation, etc) could be arranged without too much difficulty within the socio-economic constraints.

Structuring the programme raised other challenges. Clearly the Kazakh group were under local pressure to create openings for local personalities, whilst the Moscow group was anxious to maintain the international and multi-confessional image. The European group was anxious to relax the traditional Soviet and Asiatic style of conferencing, although this style was to a large degree reinforced by the Germanic background of that group.

Because of communication (telephone, fax, etc) and language difficulties, negotiating the structuring of the programme proved extremely problematic. The situation was further exacerbated by the traditional Eastern European technique of cultivating the opportunities offered by the limited availability of information (often justified by the severely limited photocopying possibilities). The programme was not announced to participants in advance, nor was it clear how many participants there would be, or from what countries or religious backgrounds.

This situation of non-transparency continued during the event. The participant package contained only a skeletal programme indicating times for non-thematic plenary sessions (daily from 10.00 to 13.00)

and workshops (daily from 15.00 to 18.00). Only workshop themes and chairpersons were shown. The themes were: Religious experience and spiritual concord (interconfessional roundtable); Toward spiritual concord through humanism (Humanitarian roundtable); Harmony of planetary and human health (problems of traditional and non-traditional medicine); All-planetary role of culture of man and mankind; Man and mankind as cosmic substance; Humanization of science and technosphere; Spiritual world and different educational cultures.

very unfortunately, the original intention to house all foreign participants in the main congress hotel proved impossible at the last minute. Dividing that group eroded communication patterns and destroyed coherence. Transportation from distant hotels was a major problem. For some this became symptomatic of the negative side of the event.

Part of the difficulty arose from the 3-month organizing time and the difficulty in knowing which tentative participants and speakers would actually be in Alma Ata. Much negotiation on speakers was done behind the scenes on the spot. But even daily lists of speakers proved difficult to organize and when posted proved totally unreliable. It is a strange experience attending a session without having any sense of who will speak, or when one might be called to speak oneself. One conclusion was that the Russian group had effective control of the plenary sessions but that the Kazakh group had achieved control of the workshop organization -- and that there was very little communication between the two.

PROCESS DYNAMICS AND COMMUNICATION

The difficulties noted above did not affect the appearance of sessions which all ran in a quite smooth and orderly manner on the basis of the last minute structure available to the chairperson. The opening session, with 3,000 participants facing 20 people barricaded behind a podium, evoked all the fears of those favouring more participative processes. The "barricade" was however removed for subsequent plenaries to be replaced by a less threatening cluster of casual seats.

The pattern of plenary processes remained unchanged. Named speakers spoke from the podium without any participation from the floor. This pattern is widely accepted in Eastern Europe and Asia, and is indeed common in German-speaking countries as well. It was accepted with difficulty by some participants and, given the lack of speaker lists, encouraged some to engage in other activities. The pattern tended to be repeated in workshops, although the opportunities for floor participation were greater in some cases.

In contrast to this authoritarian formal atmosphere was the informal process during extensive breaks within sessions. To a far greater extent than in Western countries, participants used the breaks to surround, question and dialogue with speakers. It was clear that participants felt totally empowered to use this time in a fruitful manner. It was notably the occasion for participants to congregate around a number of charismatic figures. This process was in part catalyzed by the activities of the many representatives of the press and audio-visual media.

In a further move to offer an alternative pattern of communications, the European group had funded the presence of a communications consultant, Tim Casswell (UK). During plenary sessions he used drawing and painting techniques to develop a visual record of the points made by speakers on flipchart paper. His English textual comments were supplemented by Russian translations. These sheets were then attached to the wall of the plenary room. After several days this provided participants with a visual journey through the event which could be conveniently scanned at leisure. This process attracted much attention from participants and from the media.

As an additional technique to facilitate communication between participants, Tim Casswell provided participants with the opportunity to formulate messages (questions, comments, wisdom, fears) on "post-its" (donated in quantity by the manufacturer). These were clustered onto flipchart sheets (also on the plenary wall) by theme. This simple technique, explored in other conferences (notably at the Earth Summit in Rio), also opened up new participative possibilities to participants. Both techniques had the merit of appearing complementary (rather than threatening) to the formal communication processes natural to the Russian and Asian cultures.

A number of participant groups made extensive use of the large foyer of the Congress Palace to further their own initiatives. Many set up mini-stalls from which to distribute brochures, newsletters and books. Others freely interacted with participants in a "Hyde Park Corner" style that resulted in the formation of clusters around such speakers. These self-organizing events were tolerated by the organizers and by the security forces controlling entrance to the building. It was clear that participants felt empowered to take advantage of this opportunity -- to some degree with more determination and response than in equivalent situations in the West.

PURPOSE AND CONTENT

It could be said that the art of ensuring an interesting conference is to formulate an overall theme, such as "spiritual concord", with sufficient creative ambiguity such that many different potential participants can project their own expectations onto it in the light of their special interests. Failure to supply information to challenge such expectations allows each to make of the event what they will. The declared purpose for the event was of course supplied in advance to participants. This built on the Appeal formulated in October 1991. It included the following statements:

Our civilization has reached its limits. Meanwhile we are amidst a world-wide economic, social and ecological crisis which is due to our own failure... All of these crises are obviously only the consequence of a certain development, a spiritual and moral paralysis which has afflicted all mankind. This mental standstill is the main cause for failed developments... We have to understand that there is indeed a way out of the vicious circle of contradictions which we have run into. No special cleverness or heroic efforts are necessary, but common sense and, above all, the striving for spiritual concord.

We have to recognize that suggestions for economic and political solutions, however promising they may be, cannot improve the situation any more. They are coming too late. The only feasible alternative lies in the evolution of consciousness, a change and expansion of thinking in nations, also in the awareness of being part of a living cosmos.

One abbreviated formulation for the Congress itself was:

The goal is to acquaint the world, in the light of today's problems, with the principle of peace-creating spiritual concord, in a quest to offer solutions to our major problem areas.

Another formulation, by the Kazakhstan national organizing committee, was as follows:

In our time, when the world is torn by contradictions and some remain under the spell of outdated ideas of confrontation, when basic moral values are sinking into oblivion and mankind is ruining itself in wars, we, inhabitants of the planet, should strive for the principles that will unite us -- we should strive for spiritual concord in order to preserve this civilization. (edited)

The problem with such statements is that they echo so many others of similar nature that commitment to participate can only be made on the basis of other factors. One preliminary document offered the following: *In search of the experience of oneness, the Congress offers the possibility of common meditation with Buddhists or to pray with Christians and Moslems.* Another document emphasized the importance of "spirituality" as a dimension.

SPIRITUALITY AND CONCORD: QUESTIONS VS ANSWERS

The collective pursuit of any common understanding of "spiritual concord" or "spirituality" is fraught with traps for the unwary. Most religions slide readily into complex articulations of answers and patterns of necessary beliefs as the most appropriate way of enhancing spiritual awareness. By such means spirituality may seemingly be satisfactorily defined although its essential experiential qualities must necessarily escape any such definition.

Provocatively one might present the following comparisons, in which much depends on the quality of the questions and the answers:

Culture:	many questions; many answers
Science:	many questions; few answers
Religions:	few questions; many answers
Spirituality:	few questions; few answers
Peace:	one question; one answer.

The Congress offered many the opportunity to present answers -- and this they did. Unfortunately few questions emerged from such presentations. Without questions there is no challenge or sense of opportunity for collective evolution into the unknown. Answers can be alienating to the spirit in that they deaden any potentially active response. Many of the answers have been disseminated for a long time. We have long reached the time reiteration of value statements has become fruitless, especially when no new action is imagined or intended. Relying on this mode could therefore be dangerous in these critical times.

The calls for a common understanding of spirituality, or for spiritual concord, may therefore be usefully seen not in terms of common answers of whatever quality. Is it not rather a shared understanding of the questions raised by the spiritual dilemma of our times which constitute a more appropriate challenge for the future? What are the new questions raised by the challenge of spiritual concord?

SPIRITUALITY AND CONCORD: CHALLENGE OF LANGUAGE

Several plenary speakers at the Congress referred to the inadequacy of the language used to articulate the challenge of the times. We make daily use of languages which are essentially "obsolete" in terms of our needs. What we need to understand and communicate may not be expressible in any one of the languages to which we have access. Most spiritual traditions concur in indicating that ordinary language is inadequate to the expression of the levels of understanding to which we are called to aspire -- especially if our conflicting positions are to be reconciled. This recognition is increasingly supported by academic studies of the limitations and distortions of any particular conceptual language. A congress using Russian, Kazakh, English and German provided frequent reminders of this challenge -- preventing participants from being entrapped by the insidious assumptions of "English-think" common to many international inter-faith events.

Guidelines to inter-faith discourse have been clarified in earlier meetings. Convergence in understanding of the answers formulated by different spiritual traditions has emerged from the pioneering work over a decade of the Snowmass Conference grouping representatives of 15 world religions and led by Thomas Keating. This has agreed on eight guidelines that religions have in common: 5 relate to ultimate reality; 1 to mystical life and transformation; and 2 concern moral values, non-violence and the promotion of harmony among the traditions by mutual respect for differences (see Thomas Keating: *Guidelines for interreligious understanding*. In: *Speaking of Silence: Christian and Buddhists on the Contemplative Way* (Mahweh NJ, Paulist Press, 1987)).

But is there any sense in which these pose challenges to comprehension within our existing mind-set? Do they simply call for "universal agreement"? What of those who resonate to other understandings of spirituality? Is it really necessary, as argued by Father Luis M Dolan (see *Religious Spirituality; the soul of development and change* (Bucharest UNDP Round Table on Global Change, September 1992)), to accept the fundamental distinction between "religious spirituality" and "spirituality"? The former being defined as: "a very deep and universal form of spirituality that expresses the essence of religion by connecting the transcendental with the immanent, the eternal with the temporal, through a series of significant and revealing prayers, values, beliefs, rituals and offerings that were learned from one of the original religions". Whereas the spirituality which has recently inundated the Western world is defined as: "a series of values, actions, rituals and life-styles that are usually partially or totally separated from any known religion in the world". As might be expected, philosophers have agreed the opposite, namely that "religions" do not have a monopoly on religion (Raimon Panikkar reporting on the 1973 World Congress of Philosophy, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 11, 3, Summer 1974, pp 515-517).

With the track record of religions in exacerbating conflicts, even in recent times, is it not appropriate to raise questions about their monopoly of the understandings of spirituality and transcendence appropriate to the kind of reconciliation which is apparently called for? Is it possible that there may be inherent limitations in their articulations of "rules" and "guidelines" and in their failure to evoke challenging new questions?

Speakers at the Congress were disappointing in their simplistic reiteration of familiar value statements and their exhortations to unquestioning belief in favoured creeds. There is a need to move beyond this unchallenging stage which condemns so many speeches and declarations to well-deserved oblivion. Has it not been made clear that this does not meet the needs of the young?

USING DIFFERENCES CREATIVELY

Speakers were impressive in their ability to avoid expressing reservations about each others positions. If concord is synonymous with conflict avoidance then this form of concord was well-expressed -- and disappointingly so. The positivist school of thought which favours elimination of any use of the negative form from language continues to attract fanatic adherents. The belief that concord is based on the absence of discord and tension is a growing force that ignores any challenges and condemns all opponents as requiring re-education. And yet the closing plenary session revealed depths of disagreement whose expression was swiftly suppressed -- although the challenge remains.

Is it not strange that a congress arising from a focus on "peace through culture" should ignore all that culture has been able to communicate so creatively over the centuries about the relationship between harmony and discord? As one plenary speaker noted, using a guitar to make the point, a discord in isolation is indeed unacceptable, but music based only on the use of harmonious chords rapidly appears insipid and monotonous. Music comes into its own when it uses discords to evoke recognition of higher orders of harmony by challenging the musical framework in new ways. The same point may be made in painting, drama and the other arts. Culture might indeed be defined as the art of using differences creatively. And yet here too, at least in music, different cultures have different understandings of what constitutes "harmony" and "discord" -- as is the case in some marriages where even violent conflict may be viewed as an aspect of a fundamentally harmonious relationship.

The 1991 Appeal referred to the need to find a way out of the "vicious circle of contradictions". Is it not possible that the spiritual challenge lies in using what divides us to define what unites us? The call of Professor Arnold von Keyserling, one of the principal speakers, to focus on what unites us rather than what divides us, then needs to be reframed. It is by recognizing the configuration of definable forces which divide us that we are able to use that configuration to identify the undefinable focal point which unites us. What visibly divides us in this world, is indeed superficial, being "of the surface". What unites us, underlying that surface, is a challenge to our comprehension to which the configuration of visible differences provides the key. Responding to the call to shift attention from what divides us can only be successfully accomplished by accepting the challenge to comprehension of what unites us.

The point has notably been made by Lao Tzu:

*The names that can be named are not definitive names.
Naming engenders ten thousand things...
Thirty spokes share the wheel's hub.
It is the empty centre hole that makes it useful...
Therefore profit comes from what is there.
Usefulness comes from what is not there.*

How is the nature of the emptiness which unites us to be understood other than through recognizing the configuration of forces which so "profitably" divide us? Our expressions and deepest understandings can only be carried by partial and inadequate language alienating to those with the complementary insights to correct that partiality. Comprehension of spiritual concord lies through an understanding of that emptiness -- an emptiness whose nature is the challenging question of spirituality. Efforts at naming the different understandings of that emptiness enhance the divisiveness which characterises the surface configuration of forces that protect its transcendent nature as the

quality without a name. And yet it is that configuration of divisiveness that most effectively focuses our understanding on the quality of concord that transcends it.

CONFIGURATION OF TENSIONS TOWARDS POLARIZATION

Why did the Congress succeed, for succeed it did. Why did it "work" despite the numerous constraints and the apparently cumbersome organization? How could it possibly have worked when participants and speakers avoided the central issue which had presumably brought people together?

Is it possible that it succeeded because a set of dramatically opposed forces were held in balance in such a way as to open some degree of recognition of the transcendent quality of spiritual concord? Such a configuration of polarizing forces might include the following:

(a) The orthodox religion vs alternative spirituality polarity: Traditionally orthodox religions have avoided contacts with those with "non-religious" views of spirituality. This is the tension noted above with respect to "religious spirituality" vs the forms of spirituality that have for example recently blossomed in the West. The event saw a reasonable compromise struck between the two tendencies with some evidence of mutual tolerance, if not respect, on both sides. Any criticism was voiced with circumspection. Attention was accorded to both exoteric and to esoteric perspectives, although neither was given weight as such.

(b) The "alternative medicine" vs "spiritual healing" polarity: One manifestation of "spirituality" that has some academic legitimacy is that perceived in the light of various forms of alternative medicine implying an understanding of subtle "energies". This perspective is treated with a fair degree of impatience by practitioners of "spiritual healing" of whatever school. And these in turn (especially when manifested by charismatic personalities) are viewed with some scepticism by academic investigators. Both groups were well-represented at the event. The academic perspective was legitimated by formal representatives from various academies of science, and indeed some meetings were held on university premises. Spiritual healers and their retinues were present in great numbers and attracted much media attention through their practices. But neither succeeded in dominating the proceedings.

(c) The humanistic vs transcendental polarity: There are ways of defining the human "spirit" which require no reference to transcendent dimensions or experience. Translations can easily emphasize natural definitions foreign to those who stress mystical and related experiences. The humanistic perspective is of course most readily acceptable to the academic world. It reinforces any focus on the ethical dimension, which others would consider a substitute for action in the light of a more transcendental perspective. As such it provides an opening for those educated in a materialist culture, whether in the East or in the West. Both views were represented at the event. The concluding appeal is worded in such a way that neither holds sway.

(d) The global vs personal polarity: The invitation to the event emphasizes the contextual planetary crisis and focuses on spirituality as offering the possibility of a valuable response. For some spirituality is readily reinterpreted through an exclusively personal experience. This may lead to a concern with spiritual healing, namely healing the person, as the most valid way to open the person to higher forms of insight and action. There is therefore a tension between an individual's personal situation and concern for the situation of the planet. Both were manifest in different ways at the congress. There was much focus on personal healing and many would see that as the most memorable feature of the event. But the strategic objectives of the event placed that concern firmly in a global context that called for less personal preoccupations.

(e) The formal vs informal congress processes: As noted above, the formally scheduled processes did not totally constrain the informal processes that allowed for greater individual involvement. But the informal processes did not disrupt the formal processes and the structuring that it provided. Each tolerated the pressures exerted by the other.

(f) The altruistic vs business polarity: Despite the seemingly altruistic theme of "spiritual concord", the event was organized with funding from the "economic institutions" of the Government of Kazakhstan. The principal local organizer (on behalf of the government) was a businessman with

business responsibilities. The leader of the German-speaking group was himself a businessman with commercial interests in Kazakhstan. It had been made known, at least to some Russian participants, that the event would offer opportunities to make contacts and "do business". Any such business priorities seem to have been frustrated on the whole, although many working contacts with financial consequences were made. The more altruistic were undoubtedly equally frustrated at any implication that the event could have been a cover for economic operations -- although such concerns would be understandable in a country in such dire economic straits where economic needs could legitimately be considered of much greater importance.

(g) The material wealth vs material poverty polarity: Implicit in the structure of the event was the considerable discrepancy between participants from industrialized countries and some from the countries of the former Soviet Union (or even from Asia) -- although others were from the former nomenklatura. This tension was handled very smoothly although clearly it was a factor in many interactions. Neither perspective acquired a predominant importance.

(h) The ethical austerity vs alcoholic concord polarity: With such a mix of participants of different religious backgrounds, some clearly attached great importance to various forms of abstinence, whether from meat, alcohol or both (the food available was very simple throughout the event). Others saw fit to indulge, even to excess, to create a more mundane, and better known form of "spiritual concord". Some were vegetarian but consumed alcohol. A sheepshead, a delicacy in Central Asia, circulated around the table at the closing presidential dinner. The tension between these modes of behaviour was also handled effectively.

(i) The verbal vs non-verbal polarity: As with all congresses, this was a distinctly verbal event, despite its declared concern with non-verbal dimensions of human experience. And yet, with the displays of spiritual healing, and the constant evocation of non-verbal experience, the verbal dimensions did not eventually dominate. In part this was due to the language problems which all experienced at one time or another. Much communication had to be based on non-verbal cues. Perhaps the only real attempt to explore this interface was through a remarkable use of sound forms by Christian Ide Hintze (Vienna School for Poetry). His plenary intervention constituted a creative attempt at breaking conventional expectations from verbal sounds -- thus evoking new patterns across cultural boundaries.

(j) The predictability vs uncertainty polarity: As noted above there was a strange mix of excessive planning and predictability accompanied by high levels of uncertainty concerning the next moment in any portion of the event. This created an unusual tension for many participants.

(k) The Kazakh vs Russian polarity: This obvious tension arose on the one hand from the historical relationship between the countries. On the other hand it was compounded by the Kazakh situation as local organizers with the Moscow-based group as responsible internationally and to religious partners in the enterprise. It seems to have led to a stand-off condition in which neither was able to gain complete advantage, although manifestations of the problem were evident in the presence or absence of interpretations between Russian and Kazakh. The situation was complicated by the proportion of people of Russian origin that are now citizens of Kazakhstan. Russian and Kazakh are the principle languages of Kazakhstan.

(l) The "Roerich" vs "Peace-through-Culture" polarity: There was a tension underlying the event between the PTC organizational initiative and the "Roerich" group context from which it had emerged, at least in Russia. Roerich groups have proved to be an important rallying point for a certain apolitical approach to the cultural situation in the former Soviet Union. PTC represents a new formulation, using Roerich terminology, to ground an important insight in new ways -- to some extent freed from an outmoded degree of cultism around Roerich as a personality. The congress was in many ways so successful that the "spiritual concord" focus suggested the need for a new organizational form to replace the PTC framework by which it had been brought about.

(m) The German (West) vs German-speaking (Kazakhstan) polarity: It was strange to witness the encounter between Germans from the West with those who had been displaced to Kazakhstan by the consequences of World War II. The latter are a potential political problem in the newly independent

Kazakhstan and are the focus of special attention for potential repatriation if relatives can be found in Germany. Where indeed is the "homeland" of the descendants of such resettlement programmes -- of which there are many other examples that cannot be readily resolved? This tension was acknowledged on the occasion but did not influence the organization of the event.

(n) Nuclear vs Humanitarian polarity: There was a strange and paradoxical balance to a humanitarian event in a context so marked by nuclear testing, by the presence of so many nuclear warheads, and with the major space rocket launching facility of the whole of Asia. The distorted spiritual energy was most evident to some in the extremely high incidence of genetic malformation. At the time of approving the event the President of Kazakhstan was faced with decisions on the dispersal and sale of warheads, and his wife was engaged in programmes to respond to the childrens needs.

(o) Male vs Female polarity: As might be expected, given the context, the speakers were predominantly male, with very few exceptions. And unfortunately, some of the exceptions notably failed to correct this imbalance. On the other hand the audience, and some of its key figures, exhibited a marked feminine quality. So although the event was formally controlled by men, its success can in large part be perceived as arising from the feminine quality governing the informal interaction for which that controlling framework had only partially provided a context.

For whatever reason, the congress therefore proved to be many things to many people. For some it was an inter-faith dialogue, for others it offered the experience of spiritual healing. For some it created an academic opportunity for the presentation of papers offering some legitimacy to unusual subjects. For some it could be seen as an exotic form of tourism. Some saw it as an opportunity to make contacts, or even as a business opportunity. For others it led to encounters with extraordinary people under unusual circumstances. Some saw it as a form of pilgrimage to places with a special quality of energy. Some saw it as an occasion for spiritual work.

HIDDEN SHIFT IN FOCUS

Such polarities, and the dualistic thinking that sustained them, in many ways established the boundaries of the event. Each polar tension prevented the focus of the event from drifting too far towards a polarized condition. Acting together these polarities concentrated the focus of the event at a level which transcended any of them. The congress effectively reconciled its differences, signified by those tensions, by shifting its focus into another dimension. The psychic "centre of gravity" thus emerged in a location which could not be defined by the words favoured in the language of any polarizing perspective.

This description is unnecessarily static. In reality the dynamics of the event pulled it in different ways at different times as each polarizing force exerted destabilizing pressures. Viewed more creatively, the energy engendered by any polarizing force was redistributed around the configuration of polarities. In metaphoric terms this might be understood as the expression of different musical notes. Whether in succession or in combination they formed harmonies and melodies. It was these that expressed the level of spiritual concord that was achieved.

In the best spiritual tradition, participants were unable to rely on any particular fixed pattern of categories in order to comprehend what was going on or emerging. It was a case of "not this, not that" (Neti, Neti -- in the famous Sanskrit phrase). Any particular view or formulation was implicitly subject to challenge by other aspects of the event. In effect the congress made of itself a container. Some expressed their understanding of what emerged within the container as a "sense of presence", others referred to "the magic of the place", and others referred to the presence of "angels". Many felt free to place specific religious interpretations on their understandings. Such views were voiced in exchanges between participants but not publicly. Any such understandings were of course strongly coloured by the personal experiences of the participants during the event -- of which spiritual healing was an important dimension for some.

EVALUATIONS AND LEARNINGS

In many respects the congress was a success despite remarkable constraints, notably the limited time in which it was organized. Some specific learnings might include:

(a) Conventional wisdom: Despite the conventional wisdom of international conference organizers, the event demonstrated that much could be achieved at short notice with large numbers of people.

(b) By-passing rigid structures: From a conventional Western perspective, it could be argued that the event was a success despite the non-participative organizational structure. It would seem that there is an art in working around rigid structures which has been developed to a high degree in the countries of the former Soviet Union. Perhaps greater rigidity paradoxically allows for a quality of freedom which is of greater significance than when it is deliberately planned for.

(c) Decision-making: Decision-making, whether within the organizing committee, in plenary or in workshops, was conducted by a process strange to Western eyes but with its own strengths and weaknesses. Because of the command tradition, much more power was vested in the chairperson, who was able to brush aside objections and push decisions through -- often by force of personality. No agendas were considered necessary and no records were kept of decisions taken. This "fluid" style, which undoubtedly complements the formal rigidity, does of course lend itself to various forms of abuse -- but it can speed decision-making in valuable ways.

(d) Culture of spirituality: In many ways the dynamics of the event may have been carried by the phenomenal importance attached to spirituality in Russian culture. This is of course matched by its importance in the Islamic culture that is so present in Kazakhstan and Asia in general. In a sense there is a widely shared understanding that spirituality is important, if not primary. This affects the way that communications occur and takes the sting out of constraints that would be totally unacceptable in the West. From the views of some participants, material concerns weigh relatively lightly to the point of being invisible. Whereas in the West it is rather the spiritual concerns which weigh relatively lightly, to the point of being invisible in comparison with the material concerns. Material wealth can encourage spiritual impoverishment, whether or not material impoverishment encourages spiritual wealth. One touching example was the response, by a young Russian participant, to a drunken beggar acting aggressively towards a Western participant in a wheel-chair in the hotel lobby: she held up an open palm in a peaceful warding-off gesture whilst exhorting him to desist, made the sign of the cross in front of him, and then bowed to him with hand over heart. He complied. It is common in Russia for beggars to make the sign of the cross in response to gifts.

(e) Tolerant curiosity: Relating strongly to the previous point was a willingness to encounter and listen to those expressing apparently eccentric spiritual views. The media were especially interested in the following three cases: (a) one participant, widely known in Russia, presents himself as Christ, and dresses accordingly; (b) one group of Russian participants, known as the White Brothers, also dress in Biblical style and go without shoes; (c) one participant, a well-known spiritual healer from Italy, suffers from bleeding stigmata on the hands. All three cases blended into the dynamics of the event without creating any disruption (although it is somewhat disconcerting to encounter Christ in the hotel elevator). "Christ" was however labelled "Anti-Christ" by the White Brothers.

(f) Speechifying: The structure of the event, both in plenaries and workshops, highlights the issue of the length and content of speeches in relation to spiritual concord. Is movement towards spiritual concord achieved by exposing participants to lengthy speeches which reiterate statements made on many occasions in the past? It is too easy for those who preach to their congregations to use the same mode in a congress. Why is the importance of dialogue not appreciated? Clearly dialogue, especially in a large meeting, makes for a relatively high degree of disorder. Participants, whether distinguished or otherwise, can be highly insensitive and undisciplined. The need is for a new balance between imposed structure and spontaneous interventions through which new insights can emerge. Spiritual concord may be considered as a higher order of consensus, namely a resonance between perspectives at a higher level of subtlety. It is a mistake to assume that building this level of consensus can be done by relying on the kinds of processes common to the treatment of more material concerns in conferences.

(g) Language of spiritual concord: As noted above and during the event, there is a concern with the outmoded nature of the language used to articulate spiritual concord. A special discipline is called for, namely new "rules of order" to curtail interventions which do not build towards higher forms of concord. The challenge is that it is unclear how such interventions are to be distinguished -- especially when a "discordant" intervention may be what is required to evoke subtler forms of concord. New metaphors are required to enable people to respond in ways which build the harmonies that underlie such a higher order of consensus. It is possible that more could be accomplished by avoiding exhortations laced with the well-worn value words that many continue to hope will somehow imbue society with new values and a new social order. More may be accomplished by exchange of visual images reflecting understandings of the types of order that could emerge. Rather than dialoguing about alternative views on the use and definition of terms, which represents such a preoccupation in religious discussion, greater shared insight might emerge through exchanges in terms of favoured images. Focus on terms constitutes a "direct" route which has proved relatively impassible. Switching to discussion of the merits and complementarity of visual images, as an exercise in "indirection", could prove more fruitful. Indirect routes can succeed where direct routes fail, especially where the obvious is controversial. It is useful to recall that the peace which can be defined is not the "peace which passeth all understanding". Presumably it is the latter which is a quality of spiritual concord.

(h) Collective meditation: It is strange that an event in which there were so many practitioners of spiritual disciplines avoided the opportunities for collective meditation. The event started and ended with a somewhat artificial "minute of silence". Some confessional groups made arrangements to meditate or pray together in hotel rooms. But despite much effort to arrange a collective plenary meditation, this proved impossible. It also proved impossible to negotiate access to a room for meditation amongst the European group. There is clearly a strong bias towards speech and listening to speeches. Presumably one factor opposing such meditation is the potential conflict between different groups anxious to "offer" or "guide" the meditation according to their traditional practice, and the resistance of some practitioners to such "guidance". It is disappointing that a more creative relationship between speech and silence could not be developed in the plenaries themselves. The Quaker style of meeting with its spacing of interventions, is one such format, but presumably with its own limitations.

(i) Quality of participation: Large conferences can usefully be understood as an instant community. The mix of participants always ensures the presence of a range of people. These include those with considerable expertise in enhancing the life of the community as well as those whose prime objectives are self-interest even at the price of the viability of that community. It is obviously a delicate matter to evaluate participants in this way. As a result no distinction is made between interventions that build towards greater concord, and those designed to protect vested interests. The assumption is however made that those who are in some way perceived as spiritual leaders can contribute most towards building concord, at least **within** their own tradition. Whether they are best qualified to build concord **between** religious traditions is another matter.

(j) Issue avoidance: As noted above, there was a significant failure in dealing with the issues dividing participants. Is the concord which emerges to be seen as simply "papering over the cracks" that separate the different belief systems? Transcending differences is not achieved by ignoring them or being afraid of them. Differences need to be reframed so that their function in preserving cultural identity (and preferences in spiritual practice) is acknowledged. The concluding session left these questions as hidden problems for the future to handle.

(k) Culture as a resource: Also noted above was the complete failure to make use of culture to gain a new understanding of the subtler forms of concord which are unthreatened by the more obvious forms of discord. Culture constitutes a repertoire of exercises in balancing harmony and discord in order to evoke more profound harmonies that touch the human spirit. In this vein, one plenary speaker even made an appeal to give "power to the poets". The theory of harmony basic to music has much to offer in this respect. But despite an extensive "cultural programme", with magnificent musical presentations, the implications of the cultural insights could not be related to the substantive portions of the congress programme. This was disappointing given the "peace through culture" emphasis from

which the event originated. And when cultural experiences are offered, politeness rules, for there are no available criteria to determine when the offering is an imposition rather than an enhancement of insights.

(I) Contact between participants: The absence of a participant list, or any messaging system, made it very difficult to promote contacts between participants, especially across language barriers. It is a mistake to assume that spiritual concord can be achieved by avoiding such interaction. It might be more appropriate to see the possibility of such concord as emerging only through such interaction -- provided it can be encouraged to converge in insightful ways. The art of doing this remains to be discovered -- as the limitations of computer-based messaging systems have demonstrated.

CONCLUSIONS FOR FUTURE INITIATIVES

The congress was widely reported in the press and in the audio-visual media, especially in countries of the former Soviet Union. A remarkable press conference was held involving an unusual level of genuine dialogue between key participants and journalists -- which journalists themselves rated highly. It was unusual because journalists were involved in the discussion rather than locked into their normal inquisitory role.

The congress achieved important strategic objectives in associating government with spiritual concord. This creates an important precedent in this period of crisis. That it was successfully held may be considered miracle enough. The congress produced a further Appeal as a guideline for future work, including future congresses on the theme. Negotiations were made with regard to setting up several initiatives in Alma Ata to build on the congress theme, including the establishment of a School of Wisdom. A School of Ignorance was also founded.

As to the International Association "Peace through Culture", it is as yet unclear how this body will be able to navigate into the future through the troubled waters of the former Soviet Union -- despite the success of the event. The documents of the congress will undoubtedly be published, although in what form and with what translation remains to be seen. A range of participant messages are also being edited into meaningful format in English and Russian. A further congress will undoubtedly be planned. But without written records, it is unclear what decisions will hold as a basis for further programmes. Like all extraordinary events, it could well prove unrepeatable -- the configuration of circumstances for a Second Congress on Spiritual Concord may never arise. Alma Ata would have been a good place to repeat such events on a regular basis.

Perhaps of most importance are the lessons to be carried forward to other events, notably the World Parliament of Religions (Chicago, August 1993). There is as yet a remarkable lack of contact between the various inter-faith initiatives. This raises important questions concerning the accumulation of insight and the institutional significance of "spiritual concord". This congress achieved a reasonably equitable encounter between Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. That of the Community of S. Egidio (Louvain, September 1992) was significantly polarized around the Catholic Church. It seems likely that the World Parliament of Religions will de-emphasize the Catholic and Orthodox Christian dimensions, whilst opening much more widely to the non-Catholic Christian perspectives absent in the earlier gatherings -- possibly excluding non-religious forms of spirituality. Clearly each such initiative is part of a much larger vision of spiritual concord.

Many would see the inter-faith concern as part of a wider debate on values appropriate to the emerging world order. Many conferences have explored this theme, most recently on the occasion of the Earth Summit (Rio de Janeiro, June 1992). They include the Parliamentary Earth Summit (organized by the Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders), the Earth Parliament of Indigenous Peoples, and the Sacred Earth Gathering of Wisdom Keepers (organized by the Manitou Foundation).

Can the forthcoming World Parliament of Religions avoid the traps highlighted by these other events? Is "parliament" the right metaphor through which to seek spiritual concord -- given the difficulties engendered by the spoken word and the allocutory sins into which speakers are tempted? Are speakers and participants provided with "guidelines" or "gentle hints" about the old statements, habitual

responses and ways of participating that have proven to be less useful in moving such events towards higher levels of understanding? How can new perspectives emerge through old modes of speaking with their many outworn phrases? Why do the quarrelling specialists with psychodynamic, psychoanalytic, psychotherapeutic and psychosynthesis skills contribute so little to reconfiguring such challenges more usefully? Meditation will be an important dimension of the Parliament -- but will this be more than collective celebration?

Such future events will undoubtedly prove to be successful in some measure -- despite any major errors of organization -- because participants will overwhelm any artificial barriers. But with so many such events, and so many appeals and declarations, is it sufficient to be satisfied with what such events tend to achieve? Is there a way of articulating insight, through new metaphors that do not trigger old reactions, in order to create a basis for new responses to the crises of the times? What are the new questions that are the real challenge of facilitating the emergence of spiritual concord? And what are the cognitive and cultural resources on which we can draw?

Learnings for the Future of Inter-Faith Dialogue

Part I:

Questions arising from the Parliament of the World's Religions

(Chicago, 1993)

O Lord, Forgive us for having left undone those things which we ought to have done and for having done those things which we ought not to have done.

A. Introduction

The Parliament of the World's Religions was held in Chicago (29 August-4th September 1993) — as a centennial celebration of a similar event in Chicago in 1893. This came to be seen by many as the birth of the inter-faith movement despite its origins as an official extension of an event organized by the City of Chicago to commemorate the Fourth Centenary of the arrival of Columbus in the Americas. This centennial was also marked by other inter-faith events elsewhere.

This note follows an earlier report on learnings of relevance to inter-faith gatherings (1) which includes a description of the World Congress towards Spiritual Concord (Alma Ata, 1992) already reproduced in this journal (2). It is designed to highlight some of the learnings to be gained from these events with a view to any future initiatives of this kind. As such it is less an evaluation of what was achieved and more an assessment of the questions and challenges still to be faced.

One dilemma in formulating this note is the nature of its potential readership. It is not designed for those whose interest is primarily in celebrating what has been achieved, nor is it especially concerned with any particular institutional setting through which future inter-faith events may emerge. The aim is to highlight concerns which merit attention if such events are to respond more effectively to the challenge of the times and the expectations projected onto them by many around the world.

There is a widespread tendency to emphasize the oneness at the heart of all religions, the harmony of world community, and the need for consensus. This "positive" approach has not reversed the trend towards religious violence. A contrasting approach is therefore explored here in accordance with the Dalai Lama's view that to talk of the oneness at the heart of religions is "hypocrisy". In Chicago he stressed the value and necessity of differences as serving the needs of people of different temperament. From this perspective the objective is not to make religions similar, but to learn to work creatively and effectively with those differences.

Figure 1:
International inter-faith bodies

- International Association for Religious Freedom (founded 1900)
- World Congress of Faiths (1936)
- Temple of Understanding (1960)
- World Conference on Religion and Peace (1970)
- International Interfaith Organizations Coordinating Committee (1991 as an ad hoc grouping of the above until the end of 1993)
- Association International Meetings: People and Religions (1986)
- Inter Religious Federation for World Peace (1990, by Reverend Moon)
- World Fellowship of Inter-Religious Councils

B. Background

There is a long history of inter-faith dialogues. But "inter-faith" has always been interpreted in different ways, grouping a larger or smaller number of religious traditions. Many have arisen from the initiative of a particular group and have been limited in scope to the bilateral relationship with some other religious tradition (eg Christians-Jews). There is no "map" of the overlap or isolation of different inter-faith initiatives. Nor does this appear to be a concern.

There are a number of international inter-faith organizations, beyond those which are primarily inter-denominational within traditions such as Christianity. The broadest Christian inter-denominational body is the World Council of Churches, but this does not include either Roman Catholics nor the more fundamentalist Christians grouped within the International Council of Christian Churches. The main international inter-faith bodies are indicated in Figure 1. The main international inter-faith events during the 1992-93 centennial period are indicated in Figure 2.

* Union of International Associations.

**Figure 2:
International inter-faith centennial events**

- People and Religions (Louvain-Brussels, 1992; Milan, September 1993). This annual event, grouping some 1,000 people, is essentially an initiative of the Community of S. Egidio of the Roman Catholic Church which effectively determines the programme and the pattern of invitations.
- First World Congress towards Spiritual Concord (Alma Ata, Kazakhstan, 1992) organized by the International Association "Peace through Culture" (Moscow) and bringing together a total of some 3,000 people.
- Delhi Congress of the Inter Religious Federation for World Peace (New Delhi, 1-7 February 1993), bringing together some 600 participants.
- Third General Assembly of the Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders (Kyoto, 17-23 April 1993).
- Interfaith World Celebration of Unity and Life of the World Fellowship of Inter-Religious Councils (Kanyakumari, India, August 1993) bringing together 360 participants.
- Sarva-Dharma-Sammelana (Bangalore, 18-22 August 1993) organized by the International Inter-faith Organizations Coordinating Committee) as a gathering of 600 people from actively engaged in inter-faith work in 28 countries.
- Parliament of the World's Religions (Chicago, September 1993) organized by the Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions. This originated as the initiative of a Chicago group of Baha'is, Buddhists, Hindus and Zoroastrians, later joined by Christians and others.

It is characteristic of "inter-faith politics" that these events are not functionally related to each other, although representatives of one may occasionally be consulted on the organization of another. Very few participants at one event attend any of the others, if only for financial reasons.

Few speakers at any one event will be aware of, or refer to, the other events. Whilst all may acknowledge, to some degree, the centennial period, there will be little concern at the degree of evolution of inter-faith dialogue through this pattern of events. There is no sense of continuity or ongoing work — nor any checklist of challenges and opportunities. Their declarations do not build upon one another. In brief, there is no inter-faith "flame of insight" to be carried on from one to the other.

Many would argue that anyway the focus of interfaith dialogue is on celebrating mutuality rather than clarifying new approaches. Others would argue that the connections are organic and subtle and must necessarily evolve at their own pace — irrespective of the ongoing challenges of inter-religious violence in places such as Bosnia, the Middle East, India, and Northern Ireland.

C. Appearances

Objectives

It continues to be a major achievement to bring together the representatives of different faiths for an international gathering under the same roof. From this perspective, the Chicago Parliament stands as a major symbolic success — and a striking celebration of one hundred years of progress.

A prime objective of such events seems to be to "talk up" the importance of inter-faith dialogue. Distinguished representatives of different faiths are called upon to address this theme from different angles in plenary speeches. Many succeed in devoting considerable time to this process. It arouses little controversy and confirms the credibility of the initiative — above all to the adherents of each faith. This is an opportunity to establish benchmarks. It may well be asked, given the history of inter-faith dialogue, exactly how much time needs to be devoted to this process.

Another prime objective that absorbs considerable attention is the reflection of the consensus of the assembled faiths in some form of declaration. In promoting a *Global Ethic*, the underlying intention in Chicago was not theological unity, however, but working toward peace in a world where more than two thirds of armed conflicts have religion at their core. Given the treatment accorded to such declarations by wider society, and by the religions themselves, it may be asked whether producing such documents merits the resources allocated to this process. The fate of the Declaration of Human Responsibilities for Peace Sustainability (Costa Rica, 1989) merits especial attention in this respect. And what of the relationship to the declaration of the United Nations Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, June 1993) that was only "universally agreed" under pressure of political blackmail?

Another objective is to further the process of dialogue between the faiths. This usually takes the form of ensuring discussion between representatives so that some minimal bond of friendship may develop. But beyond cordiality and professional concerns, it remains unclear to what degree real differences are effectively addressed or what it is hoped to create through dialogue.

It needs to be stressed that the Chicago Parliament evolved through a number of visions of greater or lesser ambition which attracted people with different agendas. Some of the objectives were recognized as having come "before their time", as ably noted by Ronald Kidd (3). Financial realities finally dictated that the event be essentially planned as a **local** Chicago event, especially since all the world religions (and many others) were represented there. Indeed for some the purpose was to improve interfaith relations in Chicago alone. But paradoxically, like its predecessor, it blossomed into an event of **world** significance, for which many, including the organizers, were essentially unprepared. This resulted in the presence of elements which were contrary to the principles of the initiators of the process which led up to it. The following comments need to be read in the light of this ambiguity. For some it was effectively a "Parliament of the World's Religions based in Chicago", but for many (including the media) it was treated as a truly international "World Parliament of Religions".

Setting

The initiatives of the Roman Catholic Church tend to be housed in suitably established institutions, whether universities or government buildings. That in Alma Ata was held in the national congress centre under the auspices of the President of Kazakhstan — an extraordinary initiative for the president of a newly-independent and impoverished country in a state of social transition.

In Chicago the event was held partly in the Palmer House Hilton Hotel, a large and gracious building dating from the earlier part of the century. The hotel of 23 floors had approximately 200 rooms per floor, with a number of large meeting rooms and many smaller ones. The core Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders was held in the former Chicago Stock Exchange, now part of the Art Institute. Many participants were also lodged in neighbouring hotels or with community groups.

Again it was, and remains, a symbolic achievement to hold such an event in a city widely perceived as epitomizing the spirit of hardened materialism. Given the size of the meeting, the facilities were well suited to the occasion. The challenge of the dietary and culinary exigencies of the different faiths was also well met by the hotel's many restaurants.

Participants

As in the academic world, one of the key features of international inter-faith conferences is what might be termed "chequebook invitations". For few are able to resist the temptations of long-distance travel with all expenses paid. It is therefore difficult to assess the import of such events when it is unclear what financial commitment the participant made — as contrasted with the organizer, or the local host committees. The emerging inter-faith conference circuit also exerts certain pressures, if further travel is to be forthcoming.

Although "open", participation in the Catholic initiatives tends to be confined to invited non-Catholic participants and numerous Catholics, especially seminarians and members of Catholic communities. Participant lists and breakdowns are unobtainable.

The Alma Ata initiative was also open, with the composition of the 3,000 participants largely determined by the communication networks of the semi-formal religious and spiritual movements in the former Soviet Union and the Central Asian republics. Some 100 Europeans were present, but with almost no participation from North America. An unusual mix of spiritual traditions was represented. But again no participants lists and breakdowns were obtainable.

Chicago was a magnificent success in assembling over 6,000 participants — although many may only have attended for a day or so. Registration had to be closed (under pressure from the local fire department) before the event opened because of the unexpected numbers (nearly double the number expected). The core group of invited "religious and spiritual leaders" numbered less than 200, most of whom gave lectures and workshops to the remainder, although many others were invited to play key roles in such events. Part of the success in ensuring a broad mix of faiths was due to the role played by the Host Committees in the Chicago area organized for each faith. These played a key role in organizing and financing the presence of rep-

resentatives of religions, notably from Asia. Use of multiple local host committees proved an unusually successful approach to organizing international participation. As was noted, North America is now itself home to a very broad range of non-Christian faiths, many based on spiritual communities. These too were well-represented. But again, no list of participants or breakdowns were available.

It was fairly clear that the Chicago event attracted very few participants from Europe or the Latin countries. Buddhists claimed that there was inadequate participation from Japan. Others noted the absence of Muslim theologians. Since no interpretation facilities were provided, nearly all participants necessarily had a reasonable competence in English. It is unclear, despite the exotic range of costumes, how many participants actually travelled from outside North America — beyond those specifically invited or those whose travel was facilitated from the USA. Nevertheless the range of dress and racial types created the impression of a meeting much more international than most — including those of the United Nations.

Whether the types of people attracted to the event corresponded to those most valuable in advancing the cause of inter-faith dialogue is another matter — although of concern to some participants. The skills and insights of the participants might however be judged irrelevant to the symbolic significance of the event their presence brought about. Who expected whom to achieve what?

Programme structure

The programmes of the Catholic initiatives are relatively simple, as was that of Alma Ata. In the latter case, however, the schedule was merely indicative so that even invited speakers were unclear, up until the last moment, whether in fact they would speak. Programming was a last minute exercise subject to the vagaries of last minute politics — and opportunities — and personal contact with the organizers.

The programme structure of the Chicago event was exceedingly complex. It was made up of over 600 separate events, of which 40 might be occurring in parallel at any one time. Fortunately most events took place within the Palmer House Hotel. The programme schedule given to each participant was a closely printed softbound book of some 152 pages in English. Without it, effective participation was virtually impossible. It amounted to a "street map" through which the three-dimensional space-time maze of the event could be navigated by those with such skills. The otherwise excellent programme lacked an index so locating the session in which a given personality would speak required up to an hour of study. No attempt was made to provide an index by theme. Few last minute amendments were made, and if made were virtually impossible to communicate to interested participants.

The 8-day programme was divided into the components indicated in Figure 3. The schedule ran from sunrise (meditation) to the final plenary each evening, starting at 20.00 and running through to 22.00 or 23.00.

The Parliament of the People was a lunchtime facilitated session for (up to 300) participants wanting to take the opportunity to dialogue and articulate their views for presentation to the Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders. It called upon the services of a team of some 30 facilitators. For several hours a day, these also serviced

Figure 3:
Chicago programme components

Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders (final 3 days)

Open sessions (over 8 days)
Inter-faith celebrations (morning and evening)
Plenary sessions (daily)
Presentations
Major presentations (daily)
Seminars and lectures (daily)
Symposia and workshops
Academic presentations and colloquia (daily)
Science symposium (daily)
Religion and violence (daily)
Business symposium (daily)
Conference on pluralism (daily)
Classes, exercises (daily)
Media panels (final day)

Parliament of the People (4 days at lunchtime)

Festivals, performances and exhibits
Performance series: song, dance, poetry (daily)
Festival of sacred arts
Art exhibit
Video and film festival
Concert (final day)

four "spaces" for: elders, women, men, and a hospitality centre.

In addition to the excellent internal messaging system of the hotel, there were two communication facilities operating during the event:

- (a) **TogetherNet:** a computerized network allowing communication between participants and others, before, during and subsequent to the event. Participants were invited to provide personal data for inclusion, and to subscribe to later use of the service.
- (b) **Your Voice:** a participant interaction messaging system based on 50-word messages supplied by participants whether through "suggestion boxes" or as part of the TogetherNet questionnaire. These messages, comments and questions were typed into notebook computers and printed out as a newsletter of 12 issues. Conclusions of the Parliament of the People and of the Assembly were also incorporated into the final issues of Your Voice (9).

Organization

The Parliament was organized by the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions of which the principal organ is the Board of Trustees, numbering 37 people. Practical organization was carried out by Council staff — assisted by a large and well-coordinated group of volunteers. With few exceptions Trustees are based in the USA, and primarily in the Chicago area. The Board was assisted by 14 local Host Committees for the following religious communities: African American, Anglican/Episcopal, Baha'i, Buddhist, Pan Orthodox, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Mus-

lim, Native American, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Sikh, and Zoroastrian.

The donors listed in the programme document ranged from those contributing over \$100,000 (Laurance Rockefeller, John Templeton), over \$25,000 (MacArthur Foundation, Betty Reneker, Steven Rockefeller), to those giving lesser amounts (some 80 bodies and individuals). All seem to be based in the USA.

The legitimacy of the event had been further established by ensuring "co-sponsorship" by some 200 religious bodies and organizations, all but 12 based in North America. The World Council of Churches was a notable absentee.

Operations

The event appeared to function very smoothly. Clearly the infrastructure provided by an experienced convention hotel such as the Palmer House avoided many difficulties. Partly because of the personalities present, the level of security was quite high. Many security personnel patrolled the building throughout the event.

As a "programme driven" event, the main challenges were to ensure that the responsible people and speakers were in the right rooms at the right time. Other difficulties such as document distribution and interpretation were avoided because they were not part of the process.

There was extensive media coverage of the event, especially in North America. A number of video crews were present to establish video archives. There was little provision for recording presentations and it is unclear to what extent there will be a written record of the event. No "papers" were distributed, with the exception of the Sourcebook (4).

Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders

This culminating 3-day event in the nearby former Stock Exchange — a not inappropriate location, for the discussion of values — assembled some 200 personalities (including theologians) with the objective of obtaining their signature of a *Global Ethic*. This had been prepared in advance by the Swiss theologian Dr Hans Küng in consultation with many relevant authorities, including Marcus Braybrooke (*Stepping Stones to a Global Ethic*). Küng had laid the groundwork for such a moral world order in a recent book on *Global Responsibility: in search of a new world ethic* (London, SCM Press, 1991). This called for a paradigm shift towards "a post-confessional and interreligious humanity" in which the major faiths would celebrate their common ethic while exploring their own weaknesses. The *Global Ethic* was described as an alternative framework for religion to which people would be held accountable.

Participants at the Assembly were carefully grouped into tables of approximately eight people, each reflecting an inter-faith mix. Each table included a member of the Board of Trustees as well as one member of the team of facilitators.

Participants at each table were invited to introduce themselves and to dialogue, before turning their attention to the declaration. Over half the Assembly participants signed the declaration, headed by the Dalai Lama.

Coherence

There was little effort to provide any sense of coherence or complementarity to the complex pattern of the event. From this perspective it was a celebration rather than a real effort to progress constructively towards some objective or product. The main product sought was the signature of the *Global Ethic* by the Assembly.

But a remarkable attempt was made to set the context for the event through a 240-page background document: *A Sourcebook for the Community of Religions*, prepared for the Council by Joel Beversluis (4). This could be purchased by participants from the Council and may well prove to be the most important product of the event.

The document contained a highly informative, readable mix of short contributions from a wide range of existing and solicited sources. It was organized as indicated in Figure 4.

**Figure 4:
Contents of Chicago "Sourcebook"**

The Centennial

- Legacies of the 1893 Parliament
- Religions and critical issues

Portraits of religions of the world (with their views of dialogue)

- Indigenous religions: covering African, Indigenous and Shinto religions
- World religions: covering 11 faiths
- Families, movements and branches: covering the "Christian Family Tree", Swedenborgianism, Theosophy, Unification Church, Unitarian Universalist Church, and Wicca.

Forming a community of religions: perspectives

- Introduction to interfaith cooperation and dialogue
- Guide to major interfaith organizations and centennial events
- Moving toward a global ethic: other initiatives
- Prayers and reflections from different religions

Looking toward the 21st Century

- New voices
- Warnings, declarations, visions, strategies
- Next generations: the children
- What do we do now?

There is a proposal to develop the hundreds of hours of video and audiotape into a package of resource materials, if only to match the printed summaries of the 1893 event.

D. Alternative realities

There is no question but that the event aroused great enthusiasm, attracted many highly-motivated people, and was considered a unique experience in which it was a privilege to participate. The organizers achieved much against considerable odds.

The question raised by the event is not so much what it did achieve as what it did not achieve. Because of the natural tendency to sustain the momentum of the event amongst waverers, it becomes difficult to detect challenges through which further learning and development could

take place. Any such challenges can only be seen as detracting unfruitfully from the acclaimed success of the event at a time when most initiatives tend to be evaluated in their most positive light to disguise any failure. In a media-oriented society it is frequently forgotten that it is only from failures that actual learning occurs — a reason for the power of science compared to religion. And yet most spiritual disciplines do claim a creative response to failure and the rooting out of weaknesses.

Where lies the future of inter-faith dialogue following such an event? To pursue this question, psychotherapeutic practices suggest a need to explore the "shadow" of the event to discover less comfortable realities which can challenge any tendency to complacency. It is one thing to build a positive reality to enhance communication between those who respond, it is another to understand the realities of others who do not, and who stay away. They too are part of the future of the dialogue.

The event can be observed through a number of other frames to enable recognition of possible weaknesses.

"Stockholder" perspective

Financing the event was a major challenge, especially prior to receipt of an unpredictable level of registration fees. At one stage in the preparations, the organizers had lost their donated office space and the initiative had to be reorganized with fresh funding. This creates a situation in which people may be persuaded to "invest" as stakeholders in exchange for some privileged "hold" on the structure of the event and the nature of their participation in it. What privileges could be offered in an inter-faith gathering of this kind? They could include membership of the Board of Trustees, a privileged slot in the programme, facilitated distribution of a particular message, and personal access to religious celebrities.

Who "bought" themselves a slice of the programme? It is perhaps understandable, for example, that a page of the Parliament programme should be dedicated to announcing the presentation of the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, since John Templeton was one of the principal donors to the Parliament — but some might query the intention when the recipient had been imprisoned for his role in the Watergate affair. Or perhaps it suggests useful interpretations of a *Global Ethic* through which criminals can absolve their debt to society. Others might query the place given to the Millenium Institute in the programme and in their privileged communication to the Assembly. It would of course be difficult for any organizers to avoid pressures of this kind. The question is how they affected the quality of the event. Researchers of the future will no doubt speculate on this in the light of the many clues in the programme document.

"Marketing" perspective

The event had to be "sold" to target groups to ensure an appropriate level of participation in the programme. Programme slots can be seen as a commodity for which a demand can be created. Individuals and groups respond according to their perception of the opportunity that such slots represent — for they too may be concerned to market their own wares, whether a belief system, workshops, publications, or a programme of some kind. Many religious

leaders are continually sensitive to how they are marketing themselves. What compromises were the organizers forced to make in the balance of the programme in order to ensure the presence of particular groups? In a sense the whole event may be seen as an effort by the organizers to market the *Global Ethic* as effectively as possible. What effect do such marketing pressures have on the dialogue process?

As the event snowballed in importance, the organizers were as much on the receiving end of demands for slots as endeavouring to ensure the presence of persons and groups important to their own mix of objectives. The structure of the programme seems to have evolved into a mechanism for making available programme slots (a particular room at a given time). The Palmer House had many smaller meeting rooms suitable for this purpose. As a "market place", the issue of how each such item fitted into the event as a whole did not have to be raised too strongly. Such sub-events could be, and were, effectively isolated. Too often they only catered to their own constituency or market.

For many participants, participation could be justified because at \$300 registration it offered a mega-package of lectures and workshops that was cheap compared to similar residential weekend offerings. Seldom can such a set of personalities and "gurus" be sampled in one place. As such the event could be seen as breaking new ground as a "supermarket" of transformational experiences offered to enlightened consumers — or at least to those in search of enlightenment.

"Public relations" perspective: show and celebration

All concerned wanted a good show to affirm the importance of inter-faith dialogue. But as in many events, strong presentations and performances can obscure the need to address issues which do not make for good showmanship. How did the organizers compromise on this front? What got lost in the glare of the floodlights?

When does showmanship become counterproductive? The answer could well be sooner for other cultures than is generally assumed by North Americans. Sacred gestures for some can quickly become empty gestures and parlour games for others. Perhaps the old adage should be modified to: One person's celebration is another person's alienation.

Some non-American participants were so repelled by the superficiality that they abandoned the event. Others from afar reported being so alienated by the "window shopping" attitude evoked that they switched effort to window shopping in down-town Chicago. How insignificant is the message of such a minority — especially since others were ecstatic with the experiences offered?

"Political" perspective

Of major importance in any inter-faith event is the question of inter-faith politics. The central issue of religious controversy is now whether the main religions are equally valid as the way to the same God. Thus evangelicals and fundamentalists protest against inter-faith events as a betrayal of their faith. The organizers were therefore remarkably

successful in ensuring the presence on equal terms of a wide range of religions.

A major drama in organizing the event arose between two factions: those concerned to restrict it to established religious traditions and those concerned to include all manifestations of spirituality. The latter apparently triumphed but what was the price of their success? Did Father Keating, a key figure in the dialogue movement, withdraw for this reason? The full title of the Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders was clearly one effort at a compromise. The last minute resignation of the Executive Director of the organizing group reflected some other major tension which was never disclosed. Is it not time that such differences were creatively used in conferences as a way of focusing and integrating contrasting patterns of insights? Differences will not go away until they are effectively addressed.

Given the traditional attitudes of religions since the Middle Ages, what courage to withstand pressures for the exclusion of practitioners of witchcraft and those of neopagan persuasion — even though it led to a walkout by Orthodox Christians. Four Jewish groups withdrew their sponsorship to protest the presence of Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan. The organizers successfully concealed most dynamics of this kind although they are arguably at the core of inter-faith dialogue.

Which groups refused to participate, or boycotted the event (such as the Evangelical Christians)? Which other groups walked out and why? Are some faiths more inclined to interfaith dialogue than others? Which groups seemed to acquire greater prominence than might otherwise appear justified (such as the Fellowship of Isis) and why? How is it that approximately 0.25 percent of Zoroastrians worldwide were in Chicago? Which groups were only represented in a token manner rather than by some hierarchical head? Which groups were considered to be inappropriately represented by others? Who perceived whom to be "charlatans"? Why did the Dalai Lama acquire such political significance?

What was the nature of the relationship with the other inter-faith initiatives? Each such initiative effectively "competes" with the others, so their enthusiasm for each others approach must necessarily be tempered with self-interest. Some even sought assurances, prior to participating, that they would not be put out of business.

It is naive to expect inter-faith dialogue to evolve if power relationships are ignored. There is much learning to be gained from such relationships. They mark real challenges. The organizers seem to have felt that the coherence of the event, as a "good show", was so fragile that participants could not be exposed to such realities. And yet who exactly is fooled by such cover-ups when some were reported daily in the press and others are a matter of rumour and hearsay? Should not such issues be integrated into the process? For it is they which determine who meets with whom in the future, and under what conditions.

"UN imitation" perspective

The opening plenary was the occasion of an impressively impassioned speech by Robert Muller, Chancellor of the University of Peace (Costa Rica) and former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations. Muller made a strong argument for a spiritual equivalent to the United Nations — a United Nations of Religions. He argued that the Chicago event was a precursor.

Muller is naturally enthusiastic about the achievements of the United Nations and reluctant to see that there is anything to be learnt from its failures — or those of its member states. But in using the United Nations as a model, care must be taken that deficient patterns are not simply transferred from one realm to another.

The main religions can indeed be seen like member states of a spiritual United Nations. Was the Assembly a precursor of its General Assembly — with the *Global Ethic* as the preamble to its Charter? But the more limited number of "principal" religions can also be seen as protecting their interests, purportedly through defending those of the whole, by giving themselves the privileges of membership of a spiritual Security Council. Was it these whose behind-the-scenes actions most heavily influenced the structure of the event?

And then there are the "others", corresponding to the NGOs and peoples organizations of the UN model — for whom the UN claims to act. These are the spiritually oriented groups and communities which do not form part of the traditionally established pattern of religions. In Chicago these were the "co-sponsors" and organizers of a huge array of seminars, workshops and presentations. As with the United Nations, they met in a location carefully separated from the Assembly. As with the United Nations Conferences (Earth Summit in Rio, etc.) they too were under pressure to have their Global Forum in the form of the Parliament of the People. And they too were encouraged to devote their efforts to communicate their insights to a distant Assembly with other priorities. The weaknesses and abuses of such processes are too well-known in the UN context. Does the UN ever take serious account of the insights from such parallel forums? Should this model really be followed enthusiastically?

"Social" perspective

How was it to be an ordinary participant at the event, or even a "mid-level" presenter? What was the impact of a major convention hotel environment on the interactions between people?

As an exercise in creative chaos, the event was experienced as confusing by many. The programme was such that people were constantly moving between rooms and floors to catch particular events. Elevator delays proved a major irritant. Frequent use was made of the emergency stairwells. For some it felt like cattle being herded, filtered and sorted through a stockyard (Chicago was once renowned for its stockyards!). It was difficult to find any environment in which to establish contact with other participants — despite the huge badges that each wore like a prize steer (some even had an attached array of ribbons!). Is name and origin a sufficient condition to evoke meaningful dialogue? And is the elevator the best context to initiate it? Several participants even reported on the comparative merits of the toilet in this respect, recalling the old quip: "If you can Pee together then you can Be together".

As the correspondent of *Hinduism Today* put it, despite the remarkable selection of events: "...some how the hallways proved the real meeting ground. Miles of ornate hallway along which seekers cruised — greeting, meeting, gawking, photographing, exchanging addresses. It all, at least the important part, seemed to happen in the halls: TV camera crews, radio interviews, promotion of ideas, shar-

ing of experiences, encounters with old friends. Around any corner or waiting for the elevator you could meet spiritual leaders from any of 40 major faiths and 200 sects and paths. There were healers, prophets, avatars, gurus and visionaries." (5)

Arguably the environment could be perceived as totally alienating to those of certain cultural or spiritual sensitivities. In that sense the event was for those of thicker skin, or for those who could organize their participation from their hotel room or suite — which many of other cultures chose to do. One alternative was the Parliament of the People in which dialogue was facilitated. This meant that some 300 people (5 percent of registrants) in groups of 10 to 20 were asked to address particular issues and to discuss their response to them. These structured dialogues did not allow people to form any relationships outside the externally imposed framework. Such dialogues were product oriented rather than process oriented.

How many left the event without having benefitted from contact with others there with whom they could have interacted meaningfully in the furtherance of inter-faith dialogue? At what level does such wastage become unacceptable, given the resources allocated to the event and the expectations of the many unable to attend?

But one participant argued: "*My opinion is that the Parliament fulfilled its historic promise. I applaud the triumph that I strongly feel it was. The scale made it a truly people's event, open to all. If you are a church of one, you were allowed to come. I enjoyed the weirdness of it. I mean, it was really weird. There were just all kinds of people here. There was an immense psychic energy because of the openness of the event. There were so many charismatic leaders there. I have really never experienced anything like it. That was very important to see and to experience."*

"Communication" perspective

Potentially the event offered tremendous opportunities for communication, networking and dialogue. But in fact the organizers seem to have been deeply concerned to exert maximum control over this process. In effect only "authorized" people were allowed to communicate "at" other participants. The communication in the open sessions was all one way. Apparently there was considerable fear of potential disruption if participants were allowed to question or challenge the approved speakers — many of whom were figures of spiritual authority. Worse still was apparently the prospect that participants might actually address each other during a session — bypassing the podium. Religions suffer deeply from the teaching paradigm which demeans all but the teachers — a view that is not acceptable to many others with a deep spiritual commitment. Does the spirit of dialogue not suggest that we all have the capacity to learn from each other?

The structured opportunity for dialogue within the Parliament of the People was only squeezed into the programme at the last minute against strong resistance — and scheduled at a time when weary participants would be anxious to take a break for lunch. Was this really necessary?

Opposition by the organizers to communication between participants was most evident in the strictly implemented policy preventing participants from distributing any materials of their own. This did not prevent people

from trying. But all such handout materials were frequently cleared off available surfaces by the hotel housecleaning staff on explicit instructions from the Board of Trustees. This is totally contrary to the tendency in most North American conventions which encourage participants to communicate their projects and wares — usually on display tables. But in Chicago, even the message board envisaged for 6,000 people was limited initially to flipchart size. What exactly were the organizers afraid of? Could this process not be seen as a useful safety valve?

Typical lost opportunities included the inability to make known (and collaborate in) such inter-faith initiatives as indicated in Figure 5.

**Figure 5:
Lost communication opportunities**

- An *International Biographical Directory of Religion* (6) incorporating profiles of leading representatives of the religions represented at the Parliament
- An ongoing compilation across all spiritual and psychological disciplines of 1,400 approaches to human development, and the 3,000 associated modes of awareness in the *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential* (7)
- A planned *ReligioGuide* (8) profiling of some 150 religions, highlighting points to be born in mind in seeking dialogue with them (an extension of the completed Brigham Young University program of 150 *Culturgram* profiles of national cultures)

As one attempt to improve communication between participants, the messaging newsletter *Your Voice* (9) was set up using inputs via suggestion boxes — as a last minute initiative by several members of the facilitation team equipped with notebook computers. It was funded through a handful of spontaneous contributions from participants and a line of credit from a local photocopy shop). Despite attempts at negotiations with the organizers, the boxes (with any messages) and the resulting newsletters were also trashed on occasion. A variety of techniques was developed to bypass these constraints to ensure some level of distribution. One is reminded of the Soviet attitude to the distribution of samizdat literature during the most repressive periods. Why should an inter-faith group follow that route so rigidly? Is there really a case for religious totalitarianism? Or was this part of a deal to placate one of the reluctant religious groups?

Was there really no formula under which the list of participants could be made available to facilitate subsequent networking? Copies could have been sold to cover costs — or did this detract from the marketability of the mailing list after the event, or from a "competitive advantage" in organizing future inter-faith events? People could have been questioned on registration as to whether they wished their full address to be available in this way. Was it because the organizers feared to reveal significant absences or imbalances amongst the origins of those present? Was it up to the organizers to resolve the classic problem between maximizing the potential for networking and minimizing the potential for junk mail solicitation?

"Facilitation" perspective

It is in North America that the widest range of meeting facilitation skills has been developed. Facilitators are however most frequently called upon to work under controlled conditions, whether in a corporate environment or where participants effectively contract for a facilitated meeting. It is rare for facilitators to be used in open meetings where they have no mandate from the floor to impose their favourite process. There is still strong resistance to the implication that participants might be "therapeutized" in some way. Such resistances are especially strong in international and multi-cultural events — typical of inter-faith gatherings.

Under these circumstances it was only just prior to the event that the formation of the 30-strong team of professional facilitators was approved. Members volunteered their services, which were effectively given anonymously (in some cases on a round-the-clock basis). Its focus was initially limited to the Parliament of the People (itself a last minute initiative) and the associated "lodges". The emphasis was on providing low-profile facilitation but nevertheless to focus discussion to provide inputs to the Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders — later discovered to be unable to take account of them. Facilitators were, with very few exceptions, from the USA. Despite their general lack of experience in multi-cultural, international meetings, they exhibited considerable confidence in the validity of their approach and their capacity to "run" dialogue groups.

The Parliament of the People seemed to attract people of primarily Caucasian origin — perhaps because those of other cultures attach greater importance to lunch or to other noon-time practices! In this sense the facilitators and participants were well-matched and both expressed considerable satisfaction at the evolution of the process. This led to the formulation of participant insights on "post-its" that were clustered by groups of facilitators and represented to participants on the following day. They were also typed into issues of *Your Voice* (9).

The organizers were unsure how to respond to the challenge of how to conduct the Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders. In the week prior to the event the suggestion was made to use the team of facilitators. Initially this was limited to using one facilitator per Assembly table of eight — with instructions to function in a low-key mode. Their apparent success with the early sessions of the Parliament of the People, and the stresses in the Assembly resulting from protests at the imposition of the *Global Ethic*, then led to the suggestion that aspects of the insight formulation process of the Parliament be used in the final two days of the Assembly.

The challenge in both contexts was that although the processes were successfully implemented — leading to impressive wall displays of clustered insights — this achievement could not be built upon. As with all such processes, it captures those insights which those participants who are prepared to "play the game" choose to formulate under those conditions. For those for whom the process is unsatisfactory, the options available are token responses, avoidance, and ignoring its results. And indeed in the Assembly, few of the distinguished leaders felt free enough to inspect the resulting wall displays. And because of the logistical problems imposed on *Your Voice* (9), the typed

version of the wall charts, included in the final issue, was not available until the last moments of the Assembly.

Despite its weaknesses, and given the constraints, the facilitation was nevertheless an unusually impressive exercise for a major event of this kind. What would it have taken to derive more from the openness of the organizers to a measure of facilitation? What forms of facilitation need to be evolved for such events? How can the enthusiasm for any particular process be appropriately constrained, knowing that every process will be seen as inappropriate to some key constituency in the inter-faith dialogue?

"Guidance and control" perspective

It is clear from the above that control was a major concern for the organizers. The security challenge was far from negligible — a point effectively made during the Assembly by Louis Farrakhan's six large bodyguards. There was obviously great fear that things would get out of control. It is of course ironic that this perspective should be paramount in a gathering of spiritually motivated participants. But perhaps this is a recognition of the conflict exacerbating tendencies of religions despite the peaceful values to which they all subscribe so enthusiastically. Was there a more appropriate balance to be struck between control and trust? Must such people of good faith be treated like children?

There were comments concerning the inaccessibility of the organizers. They were essentially uncontactable by ordinary participants, creating the impression that they had set up a defensive fortress around themselves. Perhaps the organizers were truly overwhelmed by the quantitative success of their enterprise. Perhaps the ordinary participants were of little significance to them. The organizers certainly gave the impression of being unwilling to listen.

The focus of the concern for control was most evident in the organization of the Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders. The organizers were rightly concerned to avoid lengthy posturing exercises by those well-known to have little resistance to this professional temptation. But, in an amazing piece of symbolism, the leaders were divided up into small tables with no access to a microphone. These tables were overlooked by an unusually high podium (a heritage of the stock exchange role of the room) from which the Chairman of the Board of Trustees ruled the room through the only microphone. Was there any sensitivity to those spiritual traditions in which none should be positioned physically higher than their spiritual leader? There was a member of the Board of Trustees at each table, symbolizing for some the role of the political commissar in the past. Hopefully the presence of a facilitator symbolized a more fruitful function for the future.

The first day of the Assembly was highly structured into short time frames each with a specific objective. It is somewhat disconcerting to see Zen Masters and others required to discuss an imposed topic for a specific number of minutes before being moved on (because of "time pressure") to the next phase towards the achievement of the organizers' objective in seeking signature of the *Global Ethic* (10). Given the location, perhaps there was some metaphorical confusion between the processes of the stock exchange and those of the stockyards! How could the organizers have led themselves to believe that people of such authority would allow themselves to be "steered" and

"herded" in this way? And why would they want it to be so? What antiquated understandings of consensus and order were governing their efforts?

Is covering up fundamental differences and highlighting superficial consensus all that our collective knowledge and spiritual insight have to offer as a strategy? Neglect of such questions led to a degradation of the Assembly process on its final day when the pressure to sign the *Global Ethic* was brought to a focus. Different factions refused to be manoeuvred, and endeavoured to make lengthy speeches. Amazingly, there were shouting matches and key figures walked out. The organizer's, endeavouring to conduct the performance of a pre-scripted piece of music, were faced with an orchestra that had abandoned the score. Members were playing their own tunes — irrespective of the resulting sense of discord. Enlightenment was less than evident for such a spiritual assembly.

The Chicago event terminated with a "Concert for the 21st Century" in a neighbouring park where some 20,000 people assembled. Aside from the music, this included speeches by the Dalai Lama and other figures. But seemingly the organizers had by this time given up their efforts at control, for over a third of the people clustered on the stage were not intended to be there — thus diminishing the significance of the experience for others.

"Spiritual" perspective

In the complexities of the event, the spiritual dimension could easily be forgotten. Each presentation was very much just that — a presentation. And there were many presentations. How was the spiritual dimension nurtured by the event?

One of the significant achievements was the nomination of a core group of the 25 most influential spiritual leaders which met privately for a period over several days. This may prove to be the basis for an ongoing structure or annual event.

In one sense the event was very much an exercise in "fullness" — a full experience par excellence. But what of the sense of "emptiness" which is so important in many traditions? Even the daily meditations obscured this dimension. As part of the marketing exercise, different groups acquired the right to market their own brand of meditation — often at the price of alienating others to whom the spiritual dimension was also important. A high price was paid by favouring "brand-name" meditations over those which encouraged inter-faith participation.

All "moments of silence" were preceded by lengthy verbal introductions — even in the Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders. Some periods of "silence" were even provided with a musical accompaniment. If collective silence is to be so feared then maybe more can be learnt from it. It had originally been hoped that many contemplatives would be present to shift the tone of the event. Why was this not possible?

"Hidden" perspectives

Many of those present would attach considerable significance to the event in terms of esoteric or other frameworks. As a confluence of spiritual energies there have been few events with which to compare it. Many prayed for its success, even in distant spiritual communities. Perhaps

to ask how such a gathering of energy was "used" is indeed inappropriate. But perhaps failing to guard against "abuse" leaves the gathering open to subtle forms of manipulation by those more skilled in such processes. Maybe there was a case for more "psychic security" and less physical security!

Nevertheless there seems to have been a significant gap between those who saw the event as "symbolically"

Figure 6:

Union of International Associations support

A combination of factors enabled the Union of International Associations to further its long-term exploration of complex international events by funding (partially or completely) participation of four people in Chicago associated with the team of facilitators for the Parliament of the People and the Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders:

- Tim Casswell (Co-founder of Creative Connections, UK, and a former contributor to the UIA's Encyclopedia) performed a key role in bringing to a focus the views expressed in the Parliament of the People, and was consequently invited to perform the same service for the Assembly of Religious and Spiritual Leaders
- Jon Jenkins (currently co-director of Imaginal Training, Netherlands, and former editor of the UIA's International Biographical Dictionary of Religions, of its Who's Who in International Organizations, and of the World Problems section of the UIA's Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential)
- Anthony Judge (based in Belgium and responsible for the UIA's Yearbook of International Organizations and for its Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential) and author of this note.
- Nadia McLaren (Australian, based in Belgium, currently editor of the World Problems section of the UIA's Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential) was responsible for the participant messaging system Your Voice which was so successful that it carried the final conclusions of the Assembly at the organizers request.

important, as a sign of new beginnings in the search for peace, and those who might have sought to go further to ensure a more effective patterning of the assembled energies in the light of such insights. Of course for some, their deepest insights would attribute perfection to the event as it was — even apparent defects contributing to the harmony of that perfection. For others this view amounts in part to an irritating form of complacency.

As one journalist put it: "many Parliament participants dream of more than breaking bread with one another." One reason given for the event by the organizers was indeed "to create for our time a new conversation." Nowhere is the nature of that conversation envisaged. From this perspective the participants could be described as having been over-blessed, over-inspired, over-informed and under-worked by the process of the Parliament.

Part II of this note explores some insights arising from the challenges and questions highlighted by the Chicago Parliament.

References

- (1) Anthony J N Judge. A Conference toward Spiritual Concord as a Metaphor of Spiritual Concord. Brussels, Union of International Associations, Brussels, 1993.
- (2) Anthony J N Judge. World Congress towards Spiritual Concord. *Transnational Associations*, 43, 1993, 1, pp. 28-37.
- (3) Ronald R Kidd. Early dreams and plans for the Centennial. In: *Sourcebook*, ref. 4, p. 10-14.
- (4) Joel Beversluis (Ed.) A Sourcebook for the Community of Religions. Chicago, Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions (P O Box 1630, Chicago IL 60690-1630, USA: \$18.00 for non-USA orders).
- (5) Can We stop Religious Conflict? (Report of Parliament of the World's Religions). *Hinduism Today*, 15, 11, November 1993.
- (6) Union of International Associations. International Biographical Dictionary of Religion. Munich, K G Saur Verlag, 1993.
- (7) Union of International Associations. Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential. Munich, K G Saur Verlag, 1991 (3rd ed), 1994 (4th ed).
- (8) V Lynn Tyler. ReligioGuide. Provo UT, David Kennedy Center for International Studies (Brigham Young University, 273 HRCB BYU, Provo UT 85602, USA).
- (9) Nadia McLaren (Ed). *Your Voice* (Participant messaging bulletin during 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions). (Copies c/o UIA, 40 rue Washington, B-1050 Brussels, Belgium).
- (10) Hans Küng and Karl-Joseph Kuschel (Eds.), A Global Ethic; the Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions. London, SCM Press, 1993 (includes commentaries on the dynamics of the Parliament).

Learnings for the Future of Inter-Faith Dialogue

Part II: Insights evoked by intractable international differences

A. Scope of "faith"

ALTHOUGH Part I of this article, in the previous issue, focused on the Parliament of the World's Religions (Chicago, 1993) as a major inter-faith event, "faith" can usefully be understood in a broader sense than in relation to religion. Dialogue is a challenge in many arenas where the entrenched "beliefs", "faiths" or "religions" may correspond to political or ideological factions, philosophies, management styles, cultural biases, or even aesthetic preferences. During the Global Forum, on the occasion of the Earth Summit (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), this challenge was explored in an Inter-Sectoral Dialogue bringing together sectors such as science, religion, labour, industry, environment, and the like (1). Representatives of particular sectors may hold to their ideological faith as strongly as adherents of a particular religion. Dialogue in an inter-religious context may therefore have learnings for other arenas, as is true of the reverse. The point is best reinforced by Kinhide Mushakoji's study of *Global Issues and Interparadigmatic Dialogue; essays on multipolar politics* (2).

B. Exploring the future of "inter-faith" dialogue

Faced with the apparent success of the Parliament of the World's Religions (Chicago, 1993), and from the upbeat reporting in its *Sourcebook* (3) on the many past and present inter-faith initiatives, it might well be asked whether there are any doubts as to the appropriateness of inter-faith strategies and visions. What is to be made of the plethora of well-meaning declarations with no institutional consequences? There is a danger of these pious efforts becoming a dubious characteristic of the inter-faith movement. Is there not a severe danger of self-satisfaction and complacency — reinforced by somewhat desperate attempts at celebration of mutuality and consensus? Is there not a danger, characteristic of religious movements, of wallowing in hope in order to avoid addressing the knotty issues of their own relationships in new ways? This tendency can be manipulated by those who are basically content with the status quo and have no real vision for new patterns of relationship.

The organizers in Chicago were strangely lax in failing to produce any concept papers to aid discussion of the future of such events, including the envisaged institutionalization of the Parliament. The only efforts made in this direction were those collected for the *Sourcebook* (3). Typically these would be high on inspiration and low on the modalities through which reality could be given to such enthusiasm other than in the simplest sense.

The intent in the following paragraphs is to endeavour to reframe the challenge of dialogue by distinguishing forms which are essentially tokenistic or minimalistic from those which should be able to open up new possibilities. The difficulty is that the latter are easily obscured by the enthusiasms, low expectations and self-congratulatory nature of the former. Only through such distinctions does it seem possible to identify the genuinely new frontiers where pioneering work is called for and to envision the future possibilities and challenges in that context.

C. Attitudes towards dialogue

It is perhaps useful to cluster types of dialogue in terms of the following attitudes:

(a) those groups who simply do not favour dialogue. In the case of spiritual or religious groups, this may follow directly from the sense that once one holds the truth, or is following the most appropriate path, interaction with those in error, or going in the wrong direction, can only be counter-productive.

(b) those groups who favour minimalistic dialogue, possibly only to avoid being labelled as isolationists. This position is clearly important to groups concerned to leave some possibilities open, as well as to those anxious to position themselves in the best light in relation to perspectives which might otherwise appear more attractive.

(c) those groups who favour and initiate dialogue on their own terms in order better to demonstrate the prime role of their own belief system. Dialogue is then envisaged in two stages: establishment of a pattern of communication apparently characterized by symmetry and equality; then use of that pattern unilaterally to communicate the essential truths. This form of dialogue is favoured by Christian ecumenical movements and in Muslim invitations to dialogue.

* Union of International Associations

(1) Anthony J N Judge. *Configuring Globally and Contending Locally; shaping the global network of local bargains by decoding and mapping Earth Summit inter-sectoral issues* (Background document for the Inter-Sectoral Dialogue, Rio de Janeiro, June 1992). Brussels, Union of International Associations, 1992.

(2) Kinhide Mushakoji. *Global Issues and Interparadigmatic Dialogue; essays on multipolar politics*. Torino, Albert Meynier, 1988.

(3) Joel Beversluis (Ed.) *A Sourcebook for the Community of Religions*. Chicago, Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions (P O Box 1630, Chicago IL 60690-1630, USA: \$18.00 for non-USA orders).

(d) those groups who are content to engage in any dialogue process, but without any expectation that it should be especially challenging or that it should progress beyond peer bonding and celebrations of mutuality.

(e) those groups who believe that progress in the quality and challenges of inter-faith dialogue can lead to the emergence of new patterns of understanding and organization of relevance to society at large.

The Chicago event, as with many inter-faith, inter-sectoral and inter-cultural initiatives, seems to have responded primarily to those of Type (d), although (c) and (b) would necessarily have participated. Thus the advice on inter-faith dialogue in the *Sourcebook* responds to the needs of those in (d). The Bangalore meeting, which immediately preceded it, is more likely to have emphasized Type (e). It is ways of envisioning Type (e) forms of dialogue which are called for in order to move beyond enthusiastic celebration of underachievement.

D. Models of dialogue

The exploration of dialogue is becoming of increasing interest — indeed there is already a need for dialogue between the competing approaches to dialogue. The Quakers have long established the importance of "gathered meetings", although even they have critics concerned at a certain complacency. David Bohm (4, 5) and Patrick de Maré each initiated experiments in dialogue which have recently become a basis for a Dialogue Project at MIT. This project is concerned with "generative dialogue as collective creation". Its director, William Isaacs, usefully distinguishes this emphasis from those associated with other models of dialogue (6):

- "therapeutic" models using the group as the vehicle through which individuals may develop (David Bohm and Patrick de Maré)
- "community building" models designed to foster a sense of shared community and mutual understanding (as advocated by Carl Rogers (7) and Scott Peck (8)),
- "negotiation" models in which efforts are made to produce mutual understanding among people holding radically different perspectives (Chasin (9))

• "hermeneutic" models of social constructionists that focus on the ability to create reality through shared meaning construction through generative metaphor.

However what remains unclear (even for Type (e) above), is how different levels or qualities of dialogue might usefully be distinguished. Leonard Swidler and others, in their dialogue on dialogue conclude that "The differences among us are partly because we each have a very different 'feel' for the words involved, but probably even more because we were speaking of different stages in the dialogue and at times had different dialogue participants in mind." (10, p. 148).

E. Levels of dialogue

What does it mean when a dialogue becomes "deeper", more profound or more significant? This can perhaps best be explored through a metaphor that clarifies possible steps in the evolution of dialogue. There may be a case, taking an Eastern martial art like aikido as a metaphor, for distinguishing different levels of proficiency in dialogue — up to a "black belt" — and bearing in mind the progression of philosophical and attitudinal subtleties in responding to an "opponent"! Shifting metaphors, perhaps there is a case for a dialogue equivalent to a "golf handicap" to constrain the undisciplined and to provide a "level table" (to use a phrase vital to a stage in the Middle East peace process).

Alternatively, a musical metaphor could be used in different ways. One way is to take the stages in the historical development of musical harmony as representing stages in the complexification and enrichment of dialogue as an exercise in social harmony (11). This could give rise to a sequence of levels such as the following:

- Level 1:* Singing in unison, based on scales (Ancient Greece)
- Level 2:* Use of any of 12 scale patterns of tones with characteristic functions (6th to 9th century)
- Level 3:* Acceptance of only simplest "perfect" harmonic ratios, allowing the addition of one or two exactly parallel voices, that later acquired melodic independence (9th century)
- Level 4:* Acceptance of other intervals and the development beyond 3-part scoring (12th to 15th century)

(4) David Bohm. *Unfolding Meaning*. Mickleton, Foundation, House, 1985.

(5) David Bohm. *Changing Consciousness; freeing ourselves from the social, political and environmental crises*. San Francisco, Harper, 1991.

(6) William N Isaacs. *Dialogue Project Summary*. Cambridge, MIT, The Dialogue Project, 1992.

(7) Carl R Rogers. *Freedom to Learn for the Eighties*. New York, Macmillan, 1983.

(8) M Scott Peck. *Different Drum; community making and world peace*. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1987.

(9) Richard Chasin et al (Eds). *One Couple, Four Realities; multiple perspectives on couple therapy*. Guilford Press, 1992.

(10) Leonard Swidler et al. *Death or Dialogue?: from the age of monologue to the age of dialogue*. London, SCM Press, 1990.

(11) Anthony J N Judge. *Liberation of Integration: universality and concord, through pattern, oscillation, harmony and embodiment*. Brussels, Union of International Associations, 1980.

Level 5: Breakdown of the distinction between the 12 classical modes, foreshadowing the major/minor system (15th century)

Level 6: Focus on the keynote as the point of departure and arrival in a composition (16th century)

Level 7: Emphasis on expressive melodic line harmonically underpinned by a baseline generating forces upon which harmonies were built (17th century)

Level 8: Deliberate use of unresolved harmonies and of ambiguous chords (19th century)

Level 9: ...

Is it possible that the Chicago efforts towards a global ethic were trapped in an understanding of harmony that dates back to Ancient Greece?

A related approach would be to consider a metaphor based on:

Level 1: Monotone (enunciation of single pattern of values, drowning out or ignoring all others)

Level 2: Competing monotones (recognition of discordant patterns of values)

Level 3: Responding tones (contrasting values responding to each other in some measure)

Level 4: Runs of tones... simple melodies (highlighting of sequences of values in resonance one with another)

Level 5: Isolated chords (harmonious value complexes and combinations)

Level 6: Sequences of chords (sequences of value complexes, providing a context for those of a more discordant nature)

Level 7: ...

The focus is here on the Western concept of music. That of the East opens the ways to seeking parallels with developments in modes of awareness which can allow the presence of elements of an apparently higher degree of incompatibility.

In both cases levels are not "superseded" through such development. Each always has its value. But at the "deeper" or "higher" levels there is greater richness. The context for any item included from a "lower" level then becomes of greater significance. At the higher levels, it is how lower level contributions to the dialogue are combined with others that is more significant than the specific quality of that contribution. As with music, the power and genius of a piece of dialogue comes from the overall pattern of combinations. At the higher levels this may appear increasingly

chaotic, but is increasingly capable of holding the degree of order found in nature. Lower levels of dialogue tend to be mechanistic, where the higher levels depend on aesthetically significant patterns of associations. Of course, from a lower level, any pattern connecting elements of significance at a higher level would necessarily be a challenge to comprehension.

There is learning too in the way people cluster themselves in their appreciation of music. There are subtleties to which music enthusiasts respond, even to the point of being fanatically snobbish about them. There are varieties of popular music which arouse deep enthusiasm, however much they horrify others. The varieties of dialogue will cluster groups in this way also. "Classical" dialogue will have its place as a complement to "Popular" dialogue — and what of "Hard Rock" dialogue or "Country and Western"? It is no coincidence, in terms of this metaphor, that the values to which the young are exposed tend currently to be most effectively articulated through musical lyrics — and this includes the notions of peace and love so emphasized in the Chicago Parliament.

F. Mapping the inter-faith space

In some respects the richness of the Chicago *Sourcebook* (3) makes for depressing reading. How is it that so many laudable groups have undertaken so many valuable initiatives with so little consequence — especially for such inter-religious conflicts as Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kashmir and the Sudan?

Each initiative seems to be undertaken without accounting for earlier or parallel initiatives. Granted this can all be seen as a case of many species in an evolving ecosystem of initiatives. But is there really no interest in mapping out that ecosystem a little more systematically? Where does each initiative "fit" on the inter-faith map? What ensures the coherence of the relationships amongst certain initiatives and the isolation of others?

In music there is a case for discovering the range of notes and how they may be organized into octaves, chords and the like. The range of instruments and the kinds of sound they make can also be distributed onto a map. Is there not a

case for doing the same with the range of religions and spiritual disciplines — however challenging the task may be, and however crude the first maps might be?

Such maps would make apparent the other "continents" and regions of spiritual experience of which each was relatively unaware. Distances and intervening "oceans" would mark the greater challenges to inter-faith dialogue — just as the length of trade routes has always marked the more challenging forms of trade. If the Chicago vision is for a United Nations of Religions, then a prerequisite is such a map of the world of spirituality to show the territories to be represented in such a global body.

There is much information from which to build maps of this kind. The editors of *Hinduism Today*, represented in the Assembly, devoted three years to work in this direction — and are adapting their work to sophisticated computer displays. As mentioned above, the database of the *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential* (12) has extended the coverage to every possible spiritual and psychological discipline associated with human development. As with the history of maps, it is the art of putting together meaningful maps which needs to be explored.

It is with such maps that better "music" can be designed to articulate the patterns of inter-faith insights. With such maps, and a more humble attitude to the unexplored levels of dialogue, the challenges of facilitating more fruitful dynamics for a body like the Assembly can be explored — in order to ensure the integration of insights at a higher order of consensus.

G. "Levels" of dialogue

Efforts towards constructing such maps seem to have got stuck in distinguishing "levels", and in responding to the twin challenges of "syncretism" and "exclusivism", vital not only from a Christian perspective but also wherever an established school of thought is concerned at the dilution or adulteration of its hard-earned truths. There is also fascination with the nature of any "underlying unity" or of some "common ground" (10, 13). Thus David Lochhead (13), in considering the stages of inter-faith encounter, distinguishes the following progression:

- a condition of isolation (in which no alternative perspective is encountered)
- a condition of hostility (in which other perspectives are demonized)
- a condition of competition (in which the differences from other perspectives are stressed in order to establish their inferiority)
- a condition of partnership (in which differences are perceived as secondary to similarities, stressing underlying unity).

He sees these levels as continued through a series of progressively more refined approaches to dialogue:

- dialogue as a means of conversion (of the other, necessarily perceived as in need of converting), in which each essentially competes with the other
- dialogue as a negotiation, in which the aim is agreement, and the search for "common ground" (which may be reduced to a lowest common denominator, and is vulnerable to the accusation of syncretism)
- dialogue as the search for mutual understanding, without necessarily seeking agreement
- dialogue as integration, through which perspective is obtained on the weak points of one's own views and the strengths of the other's, with acquisition of facility in the categories of the other's framework leading to a more profound way of experiencing one's own
- dialogue as activity, in which those involved together discover forms of understanding which none had known before, namely a movement "beyond dialogue" in which there is mutual transformation.

It can be readily assumed that better dialogue would occur between those of greater maturity in their respective faiths. And indeed the above sequence bears comparison with Michael Jacobs (14) very useful review of the stages of faith as explored in a major research project by James Fowler (15), that drew upon the cognitive development work of Jean Piaget, the psycho-social development model of Erik Erikson (16), and the moral development scheme proposed by L Kohlberg (17). Fowler's scheme gives seven levels: primal faith, intuitive-projective faith, mythic-literal faith, synthetic-conventional faith, individuative-reflective faith, conjunctive faith, and universalizing faith.

Erikson's work, and those of his interpreters such as David Capps (18), see such stages as

(12) Union of International Associations. *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential*. München, K G Saur Verlag, 1994, 4th ed.

(13) David Lochhead. *The Dialogical Imperative; a Christian reflection on inter-faith encounter*. London, SCM Press, 1988.

(14) Michael Jacobs. *Living Illusions; a psychology of belief*. London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1993.

(15) J W Fowler. *Stages of Faith: the psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*. San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1981.

(16) Erik Erikson. *Identity, Youth and Crisis*. London, Faber, 1968.

(17) L Kohlberg. *The Philosophy of Moral Development*. San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1981.

(18) David Capps. *Deadly Sins and Saving Virtues*. Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1987.

related to chronological age, although they are not necessarily age specific. It has been suggested that the ages of individual development are related to factors which can be applied more universally to the development of a mature society. To each of his ages corresponds a developmental challenge or dilemma which can be seen as related to some of the issues of dialogue noted above:

- oral-sensory age: trust vs. mistrust
- anal-muscular age: autonomy vs. shame
- locomotor-genital age: initiative vs. guilt
- latency age: industry vs. inferiority
- adolescence: identity vs. role confusion
- young adulthood: intimacy vs isolation
- adulthood: generativity vs. stagnation
- maturity: ego integrity vs. despair.

Jacobs' own stages of belief is a reinterpretation of the above into: trust and dependency, authority and autonomy, cooperation and competition, complexity and simplicity.

H. "Levels" as traps: beyond linearity

The level approach has been criticized by feminist scholars, notably Carol Gilligan (19, 20), for being gender biased in its uni-directionality. It is argued that women are less concerned with rules and more with relationships, with where actions might lead and with the history behind moral dilemmas. Emphasis on levels de-emphasizes the degree of connectedness experienced by women. Cognitively, levels may thus be seen as a metaphorical trap.

The need to see different "levels" as each providing its own valid framework, between which it is important to be able to shift flexibly, is stressed by another female scholar J Hemenway (21) in her description of four complementary faith frameworks. Jacobs endorses this principle although pointing to resemblances between such frameworks and the kinds of stage distinguished above. He stresses that her approach is not developmental in nature. There is no sense in which someone moves 'back' or 'forward' between stages that would imply a value judgement that one framework is more 'healthy' than another. He also points to the efforts of Don Cupitt (22) to produce a kind of non-linear "metro-map" interrelating 16 religious approaches.

For Jacobs, "if the wish for order draws us toward linear models, it is important to emphasize that at whatever stage a person is, especially in terms of their psychology of belief, none is any 'better' or 'worse' than another. The only qualification to this is that within each stage some forms of belief appear to be more positive for psychological health than others." (p. 52)

I. Mapping forms and opportunities for dialogue

There is the clear implication that dialogues of different quality and consequence could be associated with distinct conditions, whether considered as stages or frameworks. But the dangers of focusing on "higher level" dialogue, at the expense of others forms, derive from the failure to recognize the functions of each kind of dialogue and how they complement each other within society.

Jacobs points to the wide acceptance achieved by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (23), designed by two women based on the work of Carl Jung. This effectively provides a 4x4 square of 16 places denoting different categories of temperament (24). No developmental linear progression is suggested. Also arousing much interest is the framework of 9 conditions provided by the distinctly non-linear enneagram (25). Users are encouraged to work with the challenges of their own condition in relation to those of others they encounter, and to broaden their range of responses. A rich system was developed by the Institute of Cultural Affairs as an international community in which the idea of a never-ending journey between 16 conditions was emphasized (26). It is also appropriate to mention the remarkable significance attached to the Chinese *Book of Changes* (27) as perhaps the most sophisticated mapping of relationships between a variety of human conditions and dilemmas.

Clearly one of the most conveniently comprehensible forms of map, as a step beyond linearity, is a tabular presentation like that of Myers-Briggs. It is therefore worth speculating on the possibilities of representing the variety of opportunities for dialogue on a surface resembling the classical board game common to many cultures. Clues to the organization of such a mapping might be:

(19) Carol Gilligan. In a Different Voice: psychological theory and women's development. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1982.

(20) Carol Gilligan et al. (Eds). Mapping the Moral Domain. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1990.

(21) J Hemenway. Four faith frameworks. *Journal of Pastoral Care*, 38, 1984, 4, pp 317-23.

(22) D Cupitt. *Life Lines*. London, SCM Press, 1986.

(23) Isabel Briggs Myers and Mary H McCaulley. *Manual: a guide to the development and use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*. Palo Alto, Consulting Psychologists Press, 1985.

(24) Otto Kroeger and Janet M Thuesen. *Type Talk*. New York, Delta, 1988.

(25) Helen Palmer. *The Enneagram*. Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1988.

(26) Jon Jenkins (Ed). *The Other World: a spirit journey*. Brussels, Institute of Cultural Affairs, 1987.

(27) Richard Wilhelm (Tr). *The I Ching or Book of Changes*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1950.

- board games like chess and draughts suggest ways of seeing relationships between "opposing" dialogue partners. The games constrain the ability of each to move in relation to the other. The "developmental" value of "levels" is still present, with notions of lines and angles of advance and retreat, advantage and disadvantage, challenge and threat, that are experienced in dialogue. Particular pieces or positions may be "lost" or "taken".

- such board games have been extensively used in Buddhist and related traditions as a complement to religious education. Players move over the board between conditions ("heavens", "hells", etc) in a manner somewhat similar to "snakes and ladders" (28). Here each position is uniquely identified, possibly by illustration, as are the inscribed pieces in a game such as mahjong or the areas of a mandala. The Transformation Game developed at the Findhorn Foundation is a recent innovation with related intentions.

- qualities of space occupation and encirclement are admirably represented in games such as go. The transformation and interpenetration of spaces is elegantly represented by some of the morphing drawings of M C Escher — a technique now highly developed on computers.

- one traditional presentation of the 64 different conditions identified by the *Book of Changes* is a square 8x8 pattern. It is worth recalling the number of studies that have explored the use of its binary coding pattern, notably in relation to the genetic code (29) and the specificity of certain key amino acids. Seemingly unrelated is the remarkable identification by Buddhists of the network of 64 possible philosophical viewpoints (30).

- the computer-based game of "life" has proved to be a very thought provoking illustration of how patterns emerge, grow, move, evolve and decay over a surface similar to that of the board games described above (31). This has been valuable in the study of chaotic systems.

J. Dialogue as flow and transition

To facilitate dialogue, there may be a very strong case for avoiding the trap of imposing a pattern of definitively labelled conditions. Part of the process of dialogue is working with the stereotyped labels that one side needs to attempt to impose on the other. Indeed much of the

manoeuvring for advantage in dialogue lies in the effort to "corner" the other in some pattern of labels through which he or she may be conveniently handled. One can speculate on the nature of a board game reflecting this. Those struggling with each other in the dialogue might for example "freeze" temporarily the significance of some board positions by consensus. More intriguingly in the absence of such consensus, other positions might be given double labels, reflecting both the positive connotations of the occupier as well as the negative connotations of the adversary experiencing that position as challenging his own.

Allusions have been made to the possible nature of such rule-shifting games in novels such as Herman Hesse's *Glass Bead Game*, or M A Foster's *The Game Players of Zan*. From such a perspective, each of the efforts to distinguish levels could be seen by dialogue partners as conceptual resources that could potentially be imposed on the board during the course of the dialogue. Such a dialogue then has the potential for being continually transformed between different kinds of game. The dialogue is refreshingly defined in terms of a set of transitional objects (32). Different "light" filters or logics can be used to view the game or communication space, just as different keys (or even scales) can be used for musical expression (33).

Other clues to representing the forms and challenges of dialogue are suggested by frameworks like the periodic table of chemical elements. This is organized into columnar "groups" and row "levels" which effectively identify cellular "elements" with particular qualities. It thus highlights the possibility of development from "lighter" to "heavier" elements, as well as the emergence of the electrochemically "positive" and "negative". Such terms are of course used to distinguish different kinds of dialogue. Of special interest is the implication that suitably distant positions might "strongly" or "weakly" interact to form more or less stable configurations based on strong or weak "bonds". Physicists and chemists have long pursued the possibilities of very heavy elements, whilst appreciating the role of the lightest in the sustenance of life. Some of the social implications of such an ordering have been explored by Ed Haskell (34). A framework based on this approach is used for the functional interrelationship of international organizations (35).

(28) Harish Johari. *Leela: the game of self-knowledge*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980.

(29) Martin Schonberger. *I Ching and the Genetic Code*. Aurora Press, 1992.

(30) Bhikku Bodhi (Tr). *The Discourse on the All-Embracing Net of Views; the Brahmajala Sutta and its commentarial exegesis*. Kandy, Buddhist Publications, 1978.

(31) Manfred Eigen and Ruthild Winkler. *Laws of the Game; how the principles of nature govern chance*. New York, Harper, 1981.

(32) D W Winnicott. *Playing and Reality*. London, Penguin, 1974.

(33) Ernest G McClain. *The Myth of Invariance*. Boulder, Shambhala, 1978.

(34) Edward Haskell. *Full Circle: the moral force of unified science*. New York, Gordon and Breach, 1972.

(35) Anthony J N Judge. *Functional classification; a review of possibilities*. In: Union of International Associations. *Global Action Networks*. München, K G Saur, 1985, pp 1029-1047.

- (36) Meredith Belbin. *Management Teams; why they succeed or fail*. London, Heinemann, 1981.
- (37) Jon R Katzenbach and D K Smith. *The Wisdom of Teams; creating the high-performance organization*. Boston, Harvard Business School Press, 1993.
- (38) Anthony J N Judge. *From Networking to Tensegrity Organization*. Brussels, Union of International Associations, 1984.
- (39) Stafford Beer. *Beyond Dispute*. New York, Wiley, 1994?
- (40) P W Stephens. *Physics and Chemistry of Fullerenes*. New York, World Scientific Publishing, 1992.
- (41) Ronnie Lessem and Fred Neubauer. *European Management Systems; towards unity out of cultural diversity*. London, McGraw Hill, 1993.
- (42) Richard Pascale. *Managing on the Edge; how successful companies use conflict to stay ahead*. London, Penguin, 1990.
- (43) Leon F Seltzer. *Paradoxical Strategies in Psychotherapy; a comprehensive overview and guidebook*. New York, Wiley, 1986.
- (44) Bill Mollison. *Permaculture: a designers' manual*. Tyalgum (Australia), Tagari Publications, 1988.
- (45) Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. *Flow: the psychology of optimal experience*. New York, Harper, 1990.
- (46) Anthony J N Judge. *Higher Orders of Inter-sectoral Consensus; clarification of formal possibilities*. Brussels, Union of International Associations, 1992.
- (47) Edward Aldwell and C Schacter. *Harmony and Voice Leading*. San Diego, Harcourt, Brace, 1989.

Such clues point to forms of dialogue that would not be dependent for their dynamic on any convergence towards consensus (or away from it). As suggested by the computer game of life, stable configurations could emerge for a time, but they might also slowly migrate and develop across a framework of significance. As in many inter-personal relationships, they would be significant for a duration. Some of the above pointers suggest possibilities of "collaborative" games through which richer and more complex patterns get built through the dialogue process. Research on team building, and the variety of skills required (36, 37), suggest that these could be fruitfully associated with columns or rows of the table. Much remains to be discovered from the transition from a 2-dimensional table to a 3-dimensional map, as explored elsewhere (38, 39) and as suggested by the recent explosion of interest in fullerenes (40). The implications for management processes crossing cultural divides are especially relevant (41).

Many inter-personal relationships founder on obsession with togetherness, and its claustrophobic consequences for one or other partner. The challenge of relationships between kibbutz children is one example. It may well be that dialogue needs to free itself from the obsession with consensus as the holy grail of dialogue. Conflict is now being creatively explored by major corporations (42). In terms of Zen-style challenging paradoxes (43), it may well be that the art of fruitful dialogue lies in avoiding the stultifying consequences of agreement. The challenge of sustainable dialogue (as opposed to "cash cropping" through consensual dialogue) may require understandings analogous to those for sustainable development as exemplified by permaculture (44). What does it take to sustain dialogue? Like the grail, perhaps sustainable consensus is far more mysterious than is naively assumed. Why does dialogue stop when it does? Are there more profound meanings to "flow" in dialogue (45). Reframing dialogue as suggested above might also counter the tendency for certain dialogues to meander endlessly without constraint, as has been apparent in David Bohm's experiments.

K. Towards higher orders of consensus: freeing the voices

The above framework might be used to examine what was attempted in the Chicago Assembly process in endeavouring to manoeuvre participants into signature of the *Global Ethic*. As a parenthetical note, it is interesting that portions of that declaration were read to the Assembly using alternate male and female voices. The written declaration could however be compared to a plainsong chant from which any form of polyphony was absent. The organizers did however want the participants to furnish a chorus line ("*Peace, Peace — We agree, We agree*"!). As such, the design of the declaration is clearly relatively simple, if not simplistic, in terms of the musical metaphor outlined above. Leaders, and especially spiritual leaders, do not like to sing in chorus lines or to be part of backing vocals. That is not why they are leaders.

A more interesting form of declaration, in terms of the musical metaphor, would not have sought immediate concord between the "voices" represented by the different factions at the Assembly. Rather the declaration would have been designed to allow the different voices to challenge each other, exploring various possibilities of harmony and discord between them — using new discords to force the articulation of more profound harmonies (33, 46). Any group of composers or musicians could articulate a wealth of interesting possibilities (47). The declaration would then have taken the form of a shared journey in which each voice could be allowed a measure of "dominance" for a time. The "ethic" is then given form as a dynamic process rather than as a static end state, as a dynamic pattern of relationships rather than a static set of rules.

The theory of musical harmony suggests many possibilities for resolving the differences between voices through the text as a whole. The strength of this approach is that the identities of the different factional perspectives are not lost in a univocal "consensus" document. The discipline of designing a declaration, that could be "sung" in polyphony or "played" by a variety of instruments, would ensure its far wider dissemination than as a legalistic text or press communique. (Al Huang was so frustrated with the poetic inadequacies of the *Global Ethic* text in the Assembly,

that he said he could dance it better!) Adherents of each religion could then follow through the explorations of "their voice" and the challenges to it by the other partners in the ethical ecosystem — adding their own chorus lines if they so wished.

If different styles of music and musical values tend to be favoured by different cultures, is it any surprise that the same might be true of ethical values? If each religion or ideological faction is perceived as a musical instrument, with certain musical strengths and weaknesses, how can the most valued music be created from a group of such instruments? It would be a foolish loss of richness for them all to do the same thing. As an instrument, there are dimensions that "Christianity" can best explore, just as there are others best explored by "Buddhism" or "Islam". Management is coming to this realization (41). Chicago gathered some 40 main religions with a further 200 variants — the resources for a truly magnificent choral symphony, if ways could but be found to evoke the music from them (or through them). The challenge is to bring out the points of resonance and dissonance so as to enrich their interplay, rather than to seek simplistically to eliminate all dissonance. The music provides coherence through which the pattern of differences is "held". As noted by Leonard Swidler, as for Arnold Toynbee, "if the distinct melodies of each religion of the world could be played together, they would make for more harmony than cacophony" (10, p. 86). Why not explore this metaphor more seriously?

It is worth remembering that religions have in the past severely condemned particular styles of music, and even particular chords (*diabolus in musica*), because they did not reflect some simplistic notion of harmony. Is the *Global Ethic*, as currently conceived, not an effort to do just that? Surely what is required is an ethical presentation that honours the differences and justifies them within a larger context. It is the articulation of that context that constitutes the much-sought new paradigm. It can only be effectively articulated by using both what makes religions different and what makes them appeal differently to different cultures, rather than by simply building on commonalities. How dull and alienating music would be if it only used what was common to all cultures!

Recent years have dramatically highlighted

the ineffectual nature of policies and structures based on consensus — especially when confronted with fundamental dilemmas and radically opposed alternatives as in Bosnia. Just as significant dialogue cannot effectively be sustained without significant differences, there is a case for exploring ways of configuring and using differences regarding sustainable policies. The comprehension of more challenging approaches to dialogue, as suggested above, provides a way of evoking the new styles of comprehension required in policy-making and coalition design where differences are intractable and likely to remain so.

L. No doubt? No dialogue!

At an event such as the Parliament, it is useful to be sensitive to four modes, which everyone can get into, although some may be primarily characterized by only one of them:

- (a) Participating to teach: characteristic of presenters, spiritual leaders, and many others who actively wish to convey information from their experience, and to be seen to do so.
- (b) Participating to learn: characteristic of many who wish to hear from presenters and spiritual leaders in order to benefit from their experience.
- (c) Participating to exchange information: characteristic of the networking mode.
- (d) Participating to share doubts: characteristic of those who have discovered the limitations of both the teaching and the learning roles, and the communications they encourage.

"Doubt sharing" is exemplified by a parable offered by a member of the Parliament Board of Trustees: A man is lost deep in the woods. In his futile search for a way out, he comes upon another man and seeks his assistance. The other man replies: "Do not take the way I have for it will surely lead you astray. Now, let us seek to find the right way together."

Unfortunately the Parliament proved to be an exercise in presenting certainties (Mode a) and learning of them (Mode b). Information exchange (Mode c) was suppressed. And no process was developed to work collectively with uncertainty to uncover new routes forward (Mode d). It is from the combination of this Mode (d) with dialogue Type (e), at "higher" levels of dialogue, that the real opportunities for the future will emerge.

(48) John Cobb Jr. *Beyond Dialogue: toward a mutual transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*. Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1982.

(49) World Council of Churches. *Guidelines for dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies*. Geneva, WCC, 1979.

(50) Raimondo Panikkar. *The Intrareligious Dialogue*. New York, Paulist Press, 1978.

(51) John A T Robinson. *Truth is Two-Eyed*. London, SCM Press, 1979.

Togetherbound : a gathering of the mad

Report of a brainstorming meeting (Stuttgart, 1981) on the possible design of large-scale, high-risk/high-return, creative events for social transformation.

Introduction

Why : The time has come for an ambitious large-scale event which calls upon all the personal skills and energies we can collectively bring into focus. The challenge is simple : ourselves together – in the form of a wide range of concerned people of every perspective, whatever the degree of opposition or harmony, rationality or irrationality. The processes will be carefully designed to facilitate the expression and weaving together of these contrasting modes of operation : discovering the subtle pattern which connects what we each consider vital.

We intend to create an empty central space into which the unexpected can be born. But this is essentially a self-organizing event, despite the careful attention which will be given to processes. Much will be left to the responsibility of participants acting in the light of the spontaneous inspiration of the moment. This is a high-risk creative experience for those who believe this to be the price of real collective breakthrough.

The event should be the most exciting and testing you have ever attended : part work, part fair, with joy and despair, drama and paradox – truly a healing dance of life in its deepest and most ambiguous sense. For those committed to change, it could be the most significant. The event will not only be a catalyst for change, it will be an expression of it. Things will not be the same afterwards – especially for those who participate.

Why not : The past decades have given rise to many collective events quickly forgotten. People have gathered under every banner, in search of solutions to every problem. Achievements have been minimal and essentially cosmetic – little has been learnt from past failures. Proposed conventional gatherings and campaigns are now viewed with weary suspicion – creative people avoid them in despair.

A new approach is required which harnesses and transmutes the very energies which have distorted and undermined the processes and outcomes of past events – bland exercises in cautious rationalism or emotionalism. It is not enough to rely on personal transformation, exercises in group consciousness or on the passive belief that « all will be well ».

We have roles to play. But our very fear of action prevents us from learning how to rise beyond the polarities by which we are

frustrated, trapped and rendered impotent. The times call for inspired actions of a new kind that bring us face-to-face with all dimensions of our fear of change. In our ignorance, we must be collectively challenged before we can sense the dimensions and rhythms of the unfolding drama in which we can find roles to play.

Unless an event is collectively daring, it cannot avoid the superficial and evoke the energies for significant change and tangible outcomes – it becomes merely another charming celebration of impotence.

Context of the event

1. Background

Society has accumulated many problems and skills. Many projects have been initiated to bring the skills to bear on the problems with the support of adequate resources. Those who have participated in this mode, whether internationally or at the grass-roots level, sense the inadequacy and selfdefeating nature of our best efforts. A different type of action is called for.

2. Future

We sense the dimensions of our past failures and the values we want to embody in the future. There are inspirations and visions for the future but they lack clarity and adequate form and are not tempered by the fire of realism. The key to our difficulty is that they are usually in conflict amongst themselves. The vital link to possible action in the present by real people is lacking. This is the bridge which needs to be built.

3. Present

We are stuck in a dangerous behavioural rut, both collectively and individually. We need a special kind of crucible within which to bring our skills, problems, resources and visions into focus in order to embody a viable new approach. The proposed gathering is conceived as such a crucible.

Essential qualities and characteristics of the event

1. The key to the success of the event, through the release of a new level of participant energies, is that **the gathering will not be pre-programmed and pre-packaged**. As has been frequently demonstrated, this blocks vital initia-

tives and forces participants into a passive « consumer » role excused from any action. They are then unable to take responsibility for new action in the here-and-now – a root cause of present societal impotence. Participants need to understand that they are also key resource people.

2. This degree of freedom demands **considerable innovation on the part of the organizing group** if the event is to be of more significance than a fair, however rich the experience. Indeed, if the organizing group cannot demonstrate innovation, it is unlikely that they could facilitate participant innovation.

3. The key to the problem of channelling the participant energies freed by the absence of pre-programming lies in :

(a) **giving participants access to a pattern language** by which any group can quickly restructure part of the event according to the inspiration of the moment. One of the preparatory tasks of the organizing group is to clarify many elements of this pattern language so that participants have a vehicle of communication and a rich range of possibilities to work with, an understanding of the roles they can play, and how they might go about it. The pattern language should continually evolve as a result of participant initiative during the gathering.

(b) **maintaining at least some well-defined channels of communication to focal groups** which can help to ensure the immediate preparation and implementation of desired patterns.

(c) **ensuring the presence of a highly flexible (computer-supported) information system to guarantee maximum communication between participants at all times.** (This is in contrast with communication at participants).

4. Corresponding to the here-and-now self-organization of the event, it is vital that **skills of any kind represented at the event should in some measure be focused to the benefit of the event as a demonstration of their significance**. The gathering is society in microcosm. If its potential cannot be released in the present, and if its ills cannot be healed in the present, then those skills have little of significance to offer against the

ills of the outside world, now or in the future.

5. In order to interweave the wide range of often incompatible participant energies and perspectives – however complementary they may be in principle – **the gathering must itself be comprehensible in very different ways.** Each participant should be able to explore it in his or her own terms, however « fanciful » they may appear to others. One of the tasks of the gathering might well be to evolve far more creative and dynamic images of such a gathering and its interplay of energies. Many participants would then be equipped to perceive society as a whole in an entirely new way – to move beyond (and transmute) the sterile images inherited from past decades.
6. The gathering will be significant to the extent that participants are different and succeed in bridging their differences synergistically. **Participants will not only differ in their concerns but in the background or maturity with which**

they approach those concerns. Each has blindspots, including the organizing group. The effects of ignorance on the dynamics of the event will have to be used creatively (in the spirit of eastern martial art responses to the « enemy » who is my shadow).

7. Whilst many will be satisfied by simply encouraging the free interplay of a broad range of participant initiatives, more can be accomplished by **encouraging participant sensitivity to the balance of the event as a whole as it evolves.** What energies are called for to contain and counter-balance the excessive expression of others, or to enhance those inadequately expressed? How can concern for the whole be given form without jeopardizing diversity of expression? These are real-time exercises in strategy, analysis, synthesis, and meta-patterning.
8. The concern for balance can itself become sterile, whether sought in « rational » or « aesthetic » terms. The powerful dynamics of the opposing

(complementary) forces involved call for a **profound shift in perspective** if they are to be reconciled, to interact creatively, and to give birth to some viable new form. The « dance » of these processes can only be comprehended and guided in and through the essential drama of the moment if the gathering has achieved some measure of collective self-awareness. Description at this level becomes a matter of metaphor and poetry.

Number of participants

There are two approaches to the number of participants that could be attracted to this gathering :

1. **Fixed target :** This is the conventional approach and creates the risk of falling below the target figure if marketing is unsuccessful or other factors intervene, or exceeding the figure if marketing is « too successful ». The magic number envisaged by this approach is 50,000, which has the merit of being ambitious and striking the imagination.



The fool : an enigmatic catalyst

The court jester, the clown, the fool or the buffoon, is a mythic figure representing the inversion of the powers of the king (as the possessor of supreme powers) — or as his alter ego. He is therefore often the victim chosen in folklore as the substitute or foil for the king in rites whereby the people respond frankly and unceremoniously to such powers.

Court jesters were first recorded in the courts of the Egyptian pharaohs and were in vogue up until the 18th century in European courts, salons and taverns (*). They were often physically mishapen, if not also psychically disturbed. Ideally they were a powerful reminder of the distortion of the human condition — more immediate than the photographs disseminated via the media of today. Additionally, due to the freedom from censure and responsibility for their actions which they were accorded, they were able to mirror, parody and mimic court situations in such a way as to bring out truths which would otherwise be collectively and carefully ignored. They were often masters of song and dance, and could be a dramatic foil to pomp, superficiality and falsehood of any kind. As an ambiguous and often androgynous figure, the jester could function as a powerful social catalyst — for good or for ill, depending upon the response of those by whom he was surrounded.

The fool is an enigmatic symbol of the point of crisis when the normal or conscious appears to become perverted or infirm, and in order to regain health and well-being is obliged to turn to the dangerous, the irrational, the unconscious and the abnormal. As such, the fool is to be found on the fringe of all orders and systems, outside all conventional categories, processes and social rules. He is the bridge between the conscious and the unconscious (and between the attributes of the right and left hemispheres of the brain) — a reminder that, after having failed in our effort to order and understand the universe in the light of our intellect and instinct, there nevertheless remains another way.

Eliminating the jester from the court is as risky as allowing him to play his role. For, if « foolishness » is not given a channel through which to express itself, it seeks its own channel anyway. Parliamentary and international assemblies, particularly those in which each is conscious of the high purpose and seriousness of his role, run a considerable risk of incorporating distortion into their proceedings and results because of an inability to accept what a jester would reveal. (Political cartoons offer a partial remedy, but they lack the significance of being accepted as part of the proceedings and thus have little affect on them.)

It requires greater maturity on the part of all participants, especially the chairperson and principal speakers, to play their parts in the face of such instant feedback, in the absence of children at international assemblies, who can say whether our international emperors wear any clothes ?

... The fool, who was sitting beside the fire, heard these words, leapt to his feet, came before the King, and skipped and danced for glee, saying - Lord King, so God save me, your adventures now begin, and often you will find them perilous and hard

— Perceval, or the Story of the Grail

Joker : messenger from the unconscious

The « Court » Jester and « Foolishness »



J.J.

The question is at what target number does the risk start to increase significantly without increasing the significance of the event. Also, at what figure does the risk of « significance erosion » start to increase due to the presence of higher percentages of « hangers on » who are not able to contribute positively to the dynamics of the event – or are they part of the challenge ?

2. **Flexible target** : Using this approach the target figure would be treated in probability terms and « hardened » as the event approached and infrastructure commitments had to be made. At this stage a significant event could be envisaged anywhere in the range 500 to 50,000.

Note that these figures are relatively modest in terms of present day « instant » refugee or pilgrim camps (e.g. in India).

Location

Because of the political, infrastructure, travel and other considerations, care must be taken in the choice of location. Ideally a valley is required in which tent or other temporary shelters can be put up and serviced.

An important dilemma is obtaining a magically attractive location (lakeside, etc) without the associated risk of leaving it an ecological disaster. In this connection other alternatives are a desert location (with mountains) or an abandoned military base, provided that travel and services can be organized. Given that the event is designed to respond to the disagreeable conditions of the present, it may be preferable to hold it in an area which can be re-energized by the event if it succeeds. The apparently attractive alternative of profiting from some magical site could well be seen as a further attempt to exploit the beauties of nature and a failure to make creative use of our own psycho-social resources.

Finances

- A. **Sources** : There are a number of sources of financing which can be considered singly or in combination :

1. **Participation fee**
 - useful to select participants who really want to be there and to guarantee the grass-roots nature of the event
 - does not respond to fund requirements in advance of the event unless a pre-registration fee scheme is used
 - no guarantee that the target numbers will be reached.
2. **Concession fees**
 - useful for catering or related services
 - does not respond to early fund requirements
 - may be a constraint on flexible target participation
 - may be unavailable if the location is too distant from a city base.
3. **Corporate donations** (in funds or kind)

- may be useful for some material requirements and possibly for advertising the event
- may respond to early fund requirements
- may involve constraints or create image problems for the event.

4. **Individual donations**

- most attractive for organizers but most difficult to ensure in sufficient quantity
- most awkward in the event of financial loss.

5. **Foundations**

- increasingly difficult for innovative large-scale events, except in special cases.

6. **Media and other rights**

- very attractive if the event is a success
- very unreliable if there is risk involved in organizing the event.

7. **National or local government**

- attractive if possible, although it may affect the image
- may only be available after the event has acquired momentum.

B. **Marketing** : The key to the success of this operation is defining a sufficiently vital « package » to attract the various sources of funds noted above.

1. « *Psychological holiday* » (Together-bound...)

The gathering could be very successfully developed and marketed to individuals (and groups) as a holiday of a very different kind (excitement, risk, renewal, sense of mission, festival, « discover the future », etc.). As such the travel industry would do much to make it known as an option. People could consider it under a holiday budget rather than as a special expense. It belongs then in an identifiable category as a (psychological) adventure holiday (cf. Outwardbound courses), but with a highly innovative flavour.

2. *Social experiment*

Even if marketed as a psychological holiday, the nature of the event would also allow it to be « marketed » to foundations and governments as a self-organizing social experiment in instant community building. The degree of innovation is relevant to many research issues and would provide a field day for researchers. Universities might even « buy into the project » in order to conduct and observe experiments in that environment, on the Skylab formula. The experiment could be described as a way of self-organization in the ever present refugee camps. As such it might well be of interest to civil defense agencies or even as an exercise requiring army support (as a simulated refugee camp). It could also be described as an organizational experiment in response to mass unemployment and social alienation – a problem about which governments are increasingly anxious. As such, some governments could well be interested in financing the presence of people from their

own country. It could also be considered as an experiment in conflict resolution within a large community and therefore attract funds from « peace » sources.

3. *Hardware/software experiment*

The event could be analyzed in terms of the possible use of :

- a) innovative hardware : low-cost dwellings (domes, etc.), energy systems, sanitation systems, catering, information systems, etc.
- b) innovative software : especially computer programmes to help people to work together, focus their concerns, and generally empower them to act.

Such possibilities could well attract corporation support or assistance.

4. « *Discover the future* » campaign

With the three elements described above, a credible campaign could be launched to attract funds from individuals who believe that the experiment is worthwhile and likely to bear fruit, even though they have no intention of participating.

5. *Media rights*

Given the four elements above, the event could be sold to the media reasonably successfully.

Planning and financial risk management

It is vital that planning and financial arrangements be envisaged in terms of « fail-safe » procedures which minimize financial risk. This means that the budget should **not** be designed in fixed terms but as a function of the number of participants. Budgetary items should be plotted in terms of different target probabilities. Clearly there will be « fixed costs », but many of these will increase stepwise with increments in the number of participants.

Legal arrangements

Careful thought should be given to legal arrangements, liability, etc. Possibly several different corporate entities should be created to handle different aspects of the event and its preparation :

- a foundation or trust to receive certain funds for disbursement
- an association of participants and interested persons to express and clarify some policies
- a corporation to market the event and its products
- other bodies as required : travel agency, etc.

Towards a Pattern Language for Participants

This section gives a very provisional outline of the « windows » through which any participant might choose to perceive the gathering and the possibilities for action there. In its final form, distributed to participants, each item here would have attached comments and advice as a kind of « how-to-do-it » or « recipe » book, open to subsequent amendment by participants themselves.

A. MEETING PATTERNS (Organization and Services)

« Pattern » is a suggestive general term to describe any particular (and usually familiar) way of organizing the flow of energies in a gathering. Patterns can be combined into a network within a « pattern language ». Some of the resulting arrangements are « better » than others, and the challenge is to find arrangements which enhance the hidden quality which makes them « feel right » in a given set of circumstances.

B. PATTERN PARTICIPATION (Roles)

Many of the above patterns are « activated » only by the presence of people playing appropriate roles. People may take up these roles irrespective of the formal reason for their participation in the gathering and their performance may be more significant for the gathering than their concerns (see below). These roles may in fact be considered as sub-patterns in their own right.

C. PATTERN CONCERNS (Contributions, etc)

People participate in events because of « concerns » about which they wish to give, receive, or share, or which they wish in some way to advance or promote. These concerns colour the energy content of the patterns through which they are expressed.

The term « pattern language » is taken from a recent series of books on this question by designer Christopher Alexander
 - The Timeless Way of Building
 - A Pattern Language
 - The Oregon Experiment
 (Oxford University Press, 1975-1979).

D. PATTERN PERCEPTION (Images and strategies)

In a complex gathering people need to have some image through which to make sense of the event as a whole and of where it is going, and to help them to decide on how to participate in it. Whatever the images used they are needed to give a sense of continuity and context. Different people prefer one or more different images :

- Structure :** The gathering may be « objectified » in terms of any of the following :
 - Agenda
 - Critical pathway
 - System diagram
 - Programme matrix
 - Event timetable
 - Programme « tracks »
- Risk :** Participants may prefer to assess their participation in terms of « risk tracks ». Some may be entirely conventional low-risk lecture/discussion type events. Others may be designed to make the participant take or defend a position as a person. Others

1. Macro-patterns

Conference	Exhibition	Brainstorming	Carnival
Fair	Court	Songfest	Show/Music hall
Market/Bazaar	Festival	Games	Majlis
Agora/Forum	Lecture	Holiday camp	Dance
Symposium	Pilgrimage	Contest	Happening
Workshop	Passion play	Public blessing	Procession
Demonstration	Ceremony/Ritual	Celebration	Retreat
Drama show	Panel session	Discussion	Audio-visual
Reception	Sharing	Group meditation	

2. Micro-patterns

Talking to speaker	Coffee table discussion	Distributing papers
Speaking to group	Swapping information	Receiving documents
Sharing with another	Lobbying/Persuading	Show and tell
Protesting	Having fun	Meeting new people
Learning	Changing	Non-verbal experience

Speaker	Musician	Organizer	Wise person
Listener	Creative artist	Lobbyist	Networker
Jester	Performer	Caterer	Mediator
Facilitator	«Accompanying person»		Handicapped
Writer	Game organizer	Adviser	Fan
Therapist	Child	Old person	Appreciator
Devil's advocate		Fixer	Material arranger
Priest	Ego stroker	Presenter	Discussant
Sympathizer	Agent provocateur		Ritualist
Strategist	Improviser	Animator	Chairperson
Rapporteur	Note-taker	Super-star	Security person
Interpreter	Critic		

1. **Theoretical concerns :** as represented by the intellectual disciplines of which, ungrouped, there are some 1,800.

2. **Substantive concerns :** namely societal problems and conditions, typically including :

Population	Unemployment	Energy	Illiteracy
Inflation	Refugees	Environment	Human rights

3. **Aesthetic concerns :** especially their expression and involving others in that expression :

Music	Poetry	Theatre	Textures
Song	Art	Dance	Perfumes

4. **Intangible experiential concerns :**

Prayer	Power	Risk	Other negative values
Meditation	Humour	Renewal	Other positive values

may involve the participant in some personal transformation process. And some may be high-risk experiments which may fail as experiments do, providing lessons for the future.

3. **Ceremonial and celebration :** The gathering may be decided as a grouping of sub-ceremonies culminating or constituting some macro-event. This may involve, or be seen as, the high point of a pilgrimage with associated festival activity.

4. **Games :** The gathering may be described as a pattern of interlocking games, whether recreational, therapeutic or « serious » in intent. An underlying objective may be the emer-

gence of qualitatively superior games (e.g. in the style of Hesse's Glass Bead Game).

5. **Topic tracks :** The gathering may also be objectified as a complex set of interweaving topic (« concern ») tracks as is often done in conventional conferences.

6. **Quest :** The gathering may be attractive to some when interpreted as a mystical quest or an exercise in collective alchemical marriage.

7. **Learning pathways :** To those oriented towards education, the gathering may best be understood as a complex set of interweaving learning pathways.